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Circle in time

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Circle in time

by

Carol Joan Proctor Turner

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English
Major: English (Creative Writing)

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For the Graduate College

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CHAPTER ONE

It's a wonder Sarah found the ring at all, wedged as it was in the very back corner of the very bottom drawer of the messiest chest of drawers she'd ever seen. In fact it was a wonder Sarah had even looked in the drawer. The chest was in the furthest corner of the most crowded room Sarah had ever seen, the old coalhouse attached to the second most crowded room she'd ever seen, the shanty attached to Aunt Hattie's house. And the drawer had been stuck.

That was all she needed, Sarah thought as she tugged on the drawer pulls and kicked the side of the chest. For five whole days she'd been working her way through what seemed like dozens of chests of drawers, sorting old underwear, tea towels (that's what her mom said they were, though why anyone needed a towel for tea Sarah didn't know), fancy pillowcases, and worn sheets. And killing spiders. And cleaning out mouse nests and mouse droppings. Ugh! Well, at least the nests didn't have mice in them. For five days she'd been stuck here in Plainfield, which she was sure was the smallest town in the world. Back home in Des Moines she could have been swimming or shopping with her best friend Jenny or even babysitting for those awful Rogers twins.

Every day, and with every chest she'd cleaned out, with every pile of old junk she'd sorted, Sarah had thought about the day her mother had announced she was going to Plainfield

to settle Aunt Hattie's estate and clean out the old place and she was taking Sarah with her. They had been making lunch.

"But, Mom--" Sarah had wailed and stopped slicing the lowfat turkey ham.

"No buts, Sarah. I need you and you're coming." Her mother slapped another dollop of fat-free cholesterol-free artificial mayonnaise on a slice of whole wheat bread and spread it around.

"Ruth could --"

"Your sister will be playing her trumpet in a show out at the amusement park." Sarah's mother stuck her knife into the jar and moved to the next slice of bread. "Keep slicing. And before you mention your brother, remember Luke's going to be staying at college working and taking a class all summer." She moved to the next slice. "Better start putting those on the bread. No, honey, I'm afraid you're coming with me."

Sarah dealt the meat slices onto the bread automatically. "Why can't I just stay home like Ruth?"

"I'm nervous enough about Ruth on her own. I don't need to worry about you too."

"What about with Dad?"

"Your father doesn't have room in his apartment and he travels too much."

"I could stay with Jenny."

Her mother finished with the last slice of bread and started doling lettuce leaves onto the meat. "Who you could

stay with isn't the issue, Sarah. I need someone to help me clean up that house. Pickles next." She smiled. "Look, it could be fun. Just you and me in that big old house for a couple weeks. Who knows what treasure we'll find that we can sell for a mint when we open the antique shop. You used to love going there when you were little." She started putting the top on the first sandwich and sliced it neatly in half.

"I'm not little any more."

"I know. Go call Ruth and Luke for lunch."

A dozen lunches later Sarah had gotten her first good look inside the coalhouse and she had known it was going to take more than a couple weeks to get this job done. All summer probably wouldn't be enough to get through more junk than even the Smithsonian could want.

Sarah had never been sure why Aunt Hattie still called it a coalhouse. Sure, they had stored coal here once. But Sarah's mother said there had been oil stoves in the dining room and back parlor since before she was a little girl and now there was a furnace in the dirt cellar and big propane tank out by the garden. They might as well call it the log cabin. According to Aunt Hattie that's what it had been in the first place.

The trunks looked the most interesting--all odd shapes and sizes with fancy locks and leather straps and labels stuck all over them. Her mother said the funny-looking little black humped one came from the back of great-great grandpa's first

car. Sarah had read enough mystery stories to know that the trunks were where the interesting stuff was stored. If she'd had her "druthers," as Aunt Hattie would have said, she'd have dug right into them. Or into a desk where old letters might have been stashed. She certainly wouldn't have begun with dull old dressers and chests of drawers filled with towels and clothes. But her mother said dressers and chests, so dressers and chests it was.

And then Sarah found the ring. Back in the corner of the top drawer of the oldest pine chest, behind a pile of embroidered linen handkerchiefs.

It wasn't the kind of ring to catch the eye. In a box of jewelry it might not have even have interested her. Just a plain wide flat gold band with the initials EER engraved in fancy script on the outside. But it was the most interesting thing Sarah'd seen in five whole days.

She slipped it on her finger. It fit perfectly. Like it was meant for her.

Just then her mother poked her head in the door. "How goes it, kid?" She looked like something out of an old movie. Her hair was covered by a bandanna, which in turn was covered with cobwebs. Her face was smudged. And her shirt was -- Was this Sarah's perfectionist mother?

Sarah held out her hand. "Look what I found. Someone's wedding ring."

Her mother touched the ring with the filthiest fingernail Sarah had ever seen, even on Luke, who could get pretty filthy. "It's lovely. But I don't think it's a wedding ring."

"It's not?"

"My family believed people should never take off their wedding rings, even when they died. It brought bad luck or something. Anyway, so far as I know all the wedding rings got buried with their owners. I think this is a friendship ring. Girls your age sometimes gave them to each other."

"How old is it?"

Sarah's mother frowned and brushed a cobweb off her nose. "Old, I think. Maybe a hundred, a hundred and fifty years old. I doubt if even Aunt Hattie ever cleaned out some of these dressers."

Sarah polished the ring with her shirt tail. "Would EER be the girl who gave it or the girl who wore it?"

"I don't know. I've never seen an engraved one before. We'll have to have it appraised." Her mother tucked the end of her bandanna under its knot. "Anyway, that's for another day. What I really came to tell you was that you can stop in here for a while. You'll have to wash some of those tea towels this afternoon. Miss Hinkle is coming to tea tomorrow."

"Oh, Mom. Do I have to be there? She's so old and all she wants to talk about is boring stuff like how it was when she was little and who's related to who and stuff like that."

CHAPTER TWO

Sarah didn't like washing clothes even with a modern washer where all she had to do was throw the clothes in, add some soap, push a few buttons, and wait a while. The mere thought of washing those tea towels in Aunt Hattie's wringer washer was a nightmare in the afternoon.

It didn't take a genius like Luke to see she couldn't use it where it was, barricaded in the back corner of the shanty behind a bench with a washtub, two buckets, a box of laundry soap, a wicker basket, and a huge wooden paddle. At least she knew what those were for. Even after she'd untangled the washer's legs from a garden hose and dragged the thing out into the middle of the shanty all she could do was stare at it -- a huge tub on legs with some kind of churner in the middle, sort of like the churner thing in their washer at home, a huge two-roller wringer on top, a spigot on the bottom, and an electric cord attached to the side. At least it had electricity.

The first problem was to get it from the shanty, which didn't have water, to the kitchen, which did.

Pushing didn't work. The washer's four wheels refused to cooperate and insisted on going four ways at once, worse than the worst grocery cart she'd ever pushed.

Sarah grabbed the tub around the middle like a dance partner and inched the left legs a little, then the right.

WHOMP! She'd forgotten about the wringer, which seemed to be attached to the washer only by a hinge-like contraption on one end and swung wildly--right into her head--with the dance step. OK. Left legs, right legs, duck the wringer. Left, right, duck. Left, right, duck. She was just congratulating herself on a job well done when CLUNK, the washer came to an abrupt halt.

It was the doorway. The washer was just plain too wide to go through.

So much for moving to the kitchen. She'd have to use the buckets.

Sarah shoved the washer back to the middle of the room, grabbed the buckets, headed for the kitchen, and wondered just how many buckets of water the tub held anyway.

The answer, she decided after seven trips to the kitchen and a search for a mop, was probably ten. Add two for people who forgot to close the drain spigot before they poured the first two in. Two more for people who poured too slowly and dribbled all over the floor. She wrung out the mop into the bucket.

"Why didn't you use the hose?"

Sarah jumped and whirled around on the wet floor nearly ending up sitting in the water. Not that she could have gotten much wetter than she already was. In the doorway to the porch stood a skinny boy just about her own age. He

leaned against the doorjamb, his hands in the pockets of his ratty jeans, a baseball cap stuck on his head.

"What?"

"I said why didn't you use the hose." He pointed to the old garden hose she'd untangled from the washer's legs and then thrown back in the corner. "It'd make washing a whole lot easier."

"What? How?" The light was beginning to dawn. Of course.

"You know. Hook the hose to the faucet, run it out here and into the washer. Turn on the water." His hands went through the motions in the air, as though Sarah might have trouble with language as well as obvious uses for hoses.

"Oh." Sarah could feel a blush creeping up her neck and over her cheeks. Perfect. Now she could look bright red and stupid. She pushed the mop out to catch the water creeping away from the main puddle.

"Want me to show you how to run the washer?"

"No." Sarah wrung out the mop again. "I can do it."

The boy edged his way around the puddle, turned his hat backwards so the brim wasn't in his way, and looked in the washer. "First thing I'd do is get the agitator going to dissolve that soap and start washing the towels. Course it would've helped if you'd used hot water, I think."

"I said I can do it." Sarah had an urge to trip him with the mop. Set his self-satisfaction right down in the water.

She tightened her grip on the mop handle, took a deep breath and swabbed up some more water. Right. And prove she couldn't hold her temper either. Who was this guy? She wrung out the mop again. At least this stupid puddle was nearly gone. What was left could just stay. Sarah stood the mop on its handle in the corner, like she'd found it.

The boy dried the electric cord on his jeans. "Shouldn't get this wet. Could electrocute yourself."

"Look, whoever you are." Sarah lowered her voice. If Mom heard her shouting she'd be out here telling her to mind her manners. "I said I could do this. Why don't you mind your own business?"

He plugged in the electric cord and flipped a small switch Sarah hadn't noticed on the side of the tub. The machine began to hum and tremble. The agitator sloshed water and towels back and forth.

The boy smiled. "Why don't you dump that in the garden before you spill it again and I'll show you how to do the rest? And you really shouldn't wear that ring while you wash. You could get it caught in the wringer."

Sarah picked up the bucket with her left hand and steadied it with her right. Just one toss and...

Her mother appeared in the doorway. "Why Sarah, I didn't know you had a friend over."

The boy grinned, wiped his hands on his jeans, and thrust one out. "I'm Keith Johnson from next door. I was just helping Sarah figure out old May, here."

"May?"

"Yes, ma'am." Keith patted the washer. "That's what Miss Hattie and I called her. She's so temperamental, we decided she needed a name. I did odd jobs for Miss Hattie and I was wondering..."

Sarah made for the porch and the outside door. He was right. She needed to dump this. Quick.

She let the door slam behind her. Yes, ma'am? Sarah choked. Only a nerd would say something so, so, so nerdy. Nerds and hicks. He was a hick. That was true. If Mom decided they could go home tomorrow it wouldn't be fast enough.

Sarah snapped the last towel in place with a clothespin and brushed the hair from her eyes. What an afternoon. Between her mother promising that know-it-all Keith that Sarah would be glad to help out with Bible School and the idiot washer....Well, she'd set her mother straight about doing anything in this hick town. If all mothers were like hers it was a wonder humanity had survived as long as it had. It was also a wonder anybody ever wore clean clothes before modern washers. It was exhausting. Her shoulders and neck were killing her. She did a couple neck rolls, stretched her arms

overhead, then clasped her hands behind her back, straightening her arms and bending forward to work her back muscles. Halfway back to a standing position she stopped.

Everything in front of her had changed. The clothesline hung from three young maples instead of three old ones. And just beyond them, Aunt Hattie's grape arbor had vanished. Instead, a girl in a gingham dress was scrubbing something on a washboard over a bucket. Nearby another girl threw something that looked like a sheet into a huge pot set over an open fire and stirred it with long stick. Were they cooking the laundry?

Then they were gone and everything was as it had been.

Quickly Sarah released the tension in her shoulders and knelt down with her head on her knees. She must really have cut off the circulation to her brain. Either that or all this old stuff was really getting to her.

CHAPTER THREE

When Sarah opened the door at precisely three o'clock the next afternoon she knew why her mother had changed her jeans for a skirt and had tried to get Sarah to do the same. Miss Hinkle was dressed in what Aunt Hattie would call her "Sunday go to meeting" clothes, silky flowered dress, prim little pink hat with a veil, white gloves, and white "old-lady" purse and shoes. Even though they lived just three blocks apart and had seen each other in the grocery store this morning, this was a formal visit.

The conversation was formal, too, until Miss Hinkle had been settled in the front parlor, removed her gloves, and been served her tea. It was so nice to see them. Oh, how Hattie was missed. My, how Sarah had grown! Wasn't it nice weather? Were they going to the church picnic?

"I just don't know WHEN I last saw this CHINA! It's SO nice to see it again. And the TEA towels, and the EMBROIDERED tablecloths. A real BEAR to iron. I remember Mother ASSIGNING one of us the chore and then having to stand OVER whoever it was to make sure it got done just RIGHT. Those were your great-GREAT-grandmother's, you know, dear."

Sarah'd read books where people gushed when they talked but she'd always thought the writer was just trying to avoid saying "said" for the millionth time. She was wrong. Some people actually did gush when they talked and Miss Hinkle was

one of those people. Sarah wondered how Miss Hinkle and Aunt Hattie ever got to be best friends. Aunt Hattie hadn't exactly been the world's best listener. Could it have been because they looked so much alike, short and thin, with skin like wrinkled white tissue paper with brown blotches, and cracked voices?

"We just thought it would be nice to get them out for you, Miss Hinkle," Sarah could tell her mother was finding it hard to make conversation when she could barely get a word in edgewise between Miss Hinkle's.

"Hush, child. Call me Ada. All my friends do, you know. And we are going to be such good friends this summer, aren't we?" Miss Hinkle didn't seem to care whether anyone tried to make conversation. She made it all by herself. "I'm just so glad you could come and clean the house out yourself. We were so worried that you might have one of those companies come." She stopped to sip her tea.

"What companies, Miss Hinkle -- er, Ada?"

"Why those companies. The ones folks can hire to come in and clean an old house and sell everything for you. It's just not the same as doing it yourself, you know. Just getting in there and mucking about, cleaning out drawers and whatnot. Why, you just never know what you could find."

Sarah munched another cookie herself and stared out the window. Now there was a thought. Hire someone to do this.

But Miss Hinkle was running on and she was a change from cleaning.

"Hattie helped me clean out my folks' house, you know, because I just couldn't live in that big old barn. The one down by the church, you know. Anyway, we found all kinds of things I didn't even know they owned. An absolutely ancient tea set and a silver tray and my Aunt Flo's music. She was the musician in the family, you know. And jewelry. Nobody in my family wore jewelry that I knew of. My mother thought it was foolish. Yet there it was, you know, boxes of it. Just junk, but Hattie and I had the best time trying it all on." She munched a cookie.

Sarah was trying to envision Miss Hinkle and Aunt Hattie having fun trying on jewelry when her mother cleared her throat. Time for Sarah to say something.

"I found some jewelry yesterday, Miss Hinkle." Sarah held out her hand. "I found this ring in a drawer in the coalhouse."

Miss Hinkle touched the gold band gently. "What a wonderful find. It's a friendship ring, you know. I wonder who EER was? I imagine she was an ancestor of some sort. Or should I say ancestress? I'm sure you can figure it out. Hattie will have notes somewhere. She was interested in genealogy, you know. Hattie, I mean. If you look in the study maybe you'll find them. But that's for another day, or maybe even several other days. If you've looked in the study

at all you'll know what I mean. Hattie was a pack rat just like the rest of them. Never did know how to organize even though I offered to help. She said it just looked disorganized but she really knew where everything was. I knew she was lying because she frequently spent days and days looking for something she'd just put down."

Miss Hinkle set down her tea cup. "Show me where you found it."

"It was in the coalhouse," Sarah's mother objected.

Miss Hinkle laughed. "Heavens. I'm not afraid of a little coaldust or a few spiders. Help an old lady up and lead on."

While her mother half pulled Miss Hinkle to a standing position, Sarah set aside the dishes, and the three of them filed through the boxes in the dining room, past the washer in the yet-to-be-cleaned shanty, to the coalhouse.

Sarah opened the door, went down the two steep steps, tied the door open, went to the middle of the room, waved her hand above her head, found the light string, and gave it a tug to turn on the light.

Miss Hinkle stopped talking just long enough for Sarah's mother to help her down the steps.

"I just love this place, don't you? It was the original house, you know. The log cabin the family built when they first came here. I'll just bet some of this old furniture came with them in the covered wagon, you know. Like that

round table over there." She pointed to a wobbly table with a slightly warped top. "And that little chest of drawers might be that old." She pointed to the chest where Sarah had found the ring but went right on before Sarah could say anything.

"Oh, look at the baby carriage. Hattie rode in it when she was a baby, you know."

Sarah doubted it since the little wicker carriage didn't look big enough, or sturdy enough for a real baby. A doll maybe, but not a real live baby. But who was she to argue with Miss Hinkle?

"I've been wondering about that carriage," her mother said quickly. "Could it be older than 1900?"

"Oh, I doubt it, child. There weren't any sidewalks in town before that you know, and nobody would try getting a carriage like that over the bare land." Miss Hinkle seemed to peer into the shadows behind the carriage and under a dining table. "Now, if you find a wagon, it will probably be that old too, don't you know. I remember my brother had one and I think Hattie's did, too."

"Look at that sled." Miss Hinkle moved toward the back door which opened into the yard. "Why Hattie and I used to use to slide down the hill out in front of the house on that sled."

"But that's in the street!" Sarah blurted.

"Exactly. Just the place to sled, you know. No stubble or anything. Just smooth ground to skim over." Miss Hinkle

laughed a dry tissue paper laugh. "No traffic to worry about in those days, you know, especially when it snowed. I tell that nice Keith Johnson he should get some young folks together and have a sledding party. You just don't have the kind of fun we did."

She sighed and seemed to run down all of a sudden, reminding Sarah of the wind-up cars Luke had when he was little. "I really think I should be getting along now. But I would like to come back and mosey through here some more before you sell."

Sarah noticed her mother actually patted Miss Hinkle's hand. "Of course, ah, Ada. Anytime." She took Miss Hinkle's arm and helped her back up the steps into the shanty.

Sarah looked at the chest where she had found the ring. Could that be EER's chest? Could she really have come west in a covered wagon? Interesting.

Sarah gave the light string a tug and the coalhouse lay in deep shadows, the only light coming from the shanty.

Suddenly she started. What was that? A sound? A mouse?

Quickly she unhooked the door and leapt up the steps, letting the door slam behind her. She shivered. It hadn't been a sound, exactly. More, more of a presence.

She twisted the ring on her finger.

Like someone was there, in the shadows.

CHAPTER FOUR

After lunch, on her way out of the house for her daily trek to the postoffice, Sarah stopped in the library doorway. Miss Hinkle hadn't been kidding about the mess.

Aunt Hattie hadn't called this her library for nothing. There were so many books there was hardly room to walk. Absolutely every surface was covered with books. Piles of books stood in rows in front of the book shelves on all four walls. Books were crammed and jammed on top and in front of the books which marched along the shelves. Books surrounded the desk as high as the desk top. And where there weren't books there were papers. She'd never find EER's name in here.

Sarah turned to leave and stopped. There, on a shelf next to the door were a half dozen Bibles. The Bible Sarah's church had given her when she was eight had a page for a family tree. Not that she'd ever written on it. But maybe somebody else had written on theirs.

After the first three Bible, Sarah decided that not writing on the family tree pages must be a family trait, like blue eyes, or left handedness, or big ears. These didn't seem to have even belonged to anybody in particular. At least nobody had even bothered to write names on the flyleaves. She picked up the fourth and opened the cover.

There, on a piece of paper which had molded itself to the curves of the leather bookcover, was the drawing of a girl not

much older than Sarah. And, although the drawing appeared to have been done with charcoal and was smudged and faded, the girl seemed so alive, so real, Sarah would know her if she should come through the door.

Carefully, Sarah pried the drawing from the Bible binding and turned it over. The black India ink on the back had faded to the rusty brown Sarah was learning to expect on old papers. "Drawn by my brother, Matthew Rhodes, on my wedding day, September 30, 1855. Emma Elizabeth Rhodes."

Sarah wasn't about to tell her mother, but the one thing she rather enjoyed about Plainfield was going to the postoffice, with its ornate, old-fashioned boxes and the window where Mrs. Higgins sorted mail and gossiped. And she didn't mind when she was sent for hamburger for supper, either. The meat counter in the grocery store was like no meat counter she'd ever seen. No shrink-wrapped packages here. She had to tell the lady behind the meat counter exactly what she wanted and then got to watch while she cut the meat and wrapped it in white paper and marked it with a black marker that her mother called a grease pencil.

That didn't mean Sarah wanted to stay here, though, and it didn't mean she understood why her mother was thinking about opening an antique shop here. It wasn't exactly like the mall, where people came to buy things.

Sarah suspected Plainfield was small enough to be what her dad called "a wide place in the road." If the speed limit on the highway weren't reduced, people might miss it altogether. And judging from the way some cars whizzed through, they missed the reduced speed limit.

The postoffice and the grocery-and-everything store were always busy, of course. But the hardware store owner and the farm machinery dealer seemed to spend all their time sitting in rocking chairs on the wooden sidewalk in front of their buildings talking to each other. According to the window the bank was now the library, but she'd never seen a light on or anybody going in and out. The lodge hall looked empty too, but the bulletin board in front said "Ice Cream Social Saturday June 14 7 pm" and this Saturday would be June 14 so some things must still go on there.

As she reached the far end of Main Street and the postoffice, Sarah glanced across at the church and a thought struck her. According to the old sign on the lawn it was the "First Methodist Episcopal Church," but despite the "First" in its name it was the only church in town. And she knew from her own church history classes that Methodist circuit riders had moved into areas like this with the pioneers. Chances were Emma had belonged to it. When Sarah had joined the church at home a couple years ago she'd seen the records they kept on her. They knew when she was born, who her parents were, and when she was baptized. If this church kept the same

kind of records... It was worth a try. Anyway, it couldn't take any longer than looking for something more in Aunt Hattie's library was going too. Besides, she knew Emma's wedding date. That was a start.

Of course she probably couldn't get in during the week. The church at home was locked when nobody was in the office, to keep people from making off with the candlesticks or the flags.

And maybe the records weren't kept in the church itself. But even if she'd known where the parsonage was, Sarah wasn't about to march up to the door of a pastor whose church she'd refused to attend and make a fool of herself asking for information about somebody who'd died a century ago. She had some pride.

She crossed the street and pushed open the church doors. She stepped inside. The church was empty. Apparently flags and candlesticks weren't a big item among the thieves in Plainfield.

By the time she'd crossed the entry hall and gone through another set of double doors into the sanctuary, Sarah wasn't so sure there wasn't anyone around. The silence and the eerie shadows from the sunlight coming through the stained glass made her feel like she was intruding and ought to tiptoe and hold her breath. Of course whoever she was sneaking up on would have had to be stone deaf, she thought, when every time

she put her foot down on the old wooden floors, it sounded like an army marching and every small breath produced an echo.

She crept down the middle aisle, peaking under every pew, half expecting somebody to be hiding there.

By the time she'd gotten to the front row she'd nearly convinced herself she was alone and started to look around at the inside of the church.

Everything certainly looked old. The brass candlesticks and cross had that glow about them that her mother called patina and said only came from things being handled a lot. New things never had patina. The wooden pews and pulpit and lectern were just sort of worn around their edges and corners, like somebody had rubbed some of the wood away and the steps to the altar had foot-shaped depressions deep enough to hold water. Even in the dim light Sarah could see that the white parts of the silk flags and altar cloths were very faintly yellow like lots of the tea towels and fancy table cloths she'd been sorting and counting, and washing, the past few days.

It was then that Sarah realized there was at least one thing that couldn't have been the same in Emma's time. The plaques. There was one on every candlestick, every pew, and every stained glass window. She started peering at the ones on the nearest pews. Each said "In loving memory of" and gave a name and birth and death dates. Could there be one for Emma?

Sarah started reading the plaques more intently. Joshua and Sarah Johnson, Abraham Smith, John and Lydia Watkins, Josiah and Elizabeth Hopkins, Susannah Morgan....

"Hello, may I help you?"

Sarah gasped and grabbed hold of Benjamin and Mary Logan's pew. Her heart was thudding in her chest.

A man stood in the doorway. Great. And here she'd just assumed that what she'd heard about small towns being so safe was true. Maybe the doors had been unlocked because they couldn't be locked and not because there wasn't anyone to lock out. Small towns were supposed to be so safe.

The man smiled gently. He certainly didn't look threatening, in his grayish sweatpants and black Nikes and dark blue, or maybe it was purple? sweatshirt. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you. I'm Jacob Kincaid, the minister. And you are?"

He looked too young to be a minister. He wasn't much older than some of Ruth's friends. Every minister Sarah'd ever seen was at least as old as her father. What did the sweatshirt say? Something Something Seminary. Sarah took a deep breath. "I...I'm Sarah Kendall."

"Of course." He smiled. "Hattie Morgan's niece. Your mother said you were here with her. How may I help you?"

"I've come about Emma."

"Emma?" His head tilted slightly, like Sarah's dog King when he was puzzled by something somebody said. Only the minister's ears didn't perk up.

Sarah mentally kicked herself. Dummy. Of course he didn't know who she was talking about. He wasn't the one running around trying to find out something about somebody who lived in another century. "Emma Elizabeth Rhodes. Her name is in Aunt Hattie's Bible -- well I guess it must have first been Emma's Bible. I think this is her ring." Sarah held out her hand.

Jacob Kincaid nodded. "An ancestor."

"You know who I mean?"

"Not exactly. But your Aunt Hattie mentioned that her great-great-grandfather Rhodes built her house. Since you found the ring and Bible there I assume Emma was a relative."

He moved to a huge old-fashioned bookcase at the back of the sanctuary, took the first in a row of large worn volumes from the shelf and offered it to Sarah. "Some people find church records help a lot with genealogies. Emma should be in one of these books. Since the Rhodes were one of the families to start this congregation it might be easiest to just start at the very beginning."

Sarah shut the last dusty book and rubbed her eyes. Next time she'd ask Jake -- would he mind if she called him Jake, she wondered -- Kincaid if she could take a couple volumes at

least out on the steps where the light was better. The handwriting was so cramped and faded that just reading the lists of names and dates was made her feel more tired than she'd felt even after sorting through the coalhouse all day.

She closed her eyes, leaned her head to the left, and started to do neckrolls to loosen her shoulder muscles. She had found a couple references to Emma, though. Emma had been the daughter of Benjamin Franklin Rhodes and Faith Elizabeth Humphrey Rhodes. Head up. And she'd married Joseph Morgan. Head to the right. If Benjamin was Aunt Hattie's great-great grandfather and Aunt Hattie was the sister of Sarah's great-grandmother that made Emma ...

Sarah opened her eyes, then blinked, and looked again. All this research into the past must have affected her mind.

Up front, where the altar was just moments ago -- or was it hours? -- a girl in a long gingham dress with a bonnet tied around her neck was standing in front of a plain wooden table fixing flowers. But as Sarah watched she just -- well, one second she was there, Sarah could swear she was, and the next she was gone.

Vanished.

CHAPTER FIVE

The next morning Sarah was up almost before the rooster crowed, as Aunt Hattie would have put it. Or was it "up with the chickens?" Sarah couldn't remember. At any rate it was certainly the earliest she'd been up since coming to Plainfield.

And, once up, she didn't dawdle as she usually did, moseying down to breakfast at the last possible moment before her mother got angry and put the juice away, reading every section of the newspaper twice when she never read the paper at home, fiddling with the crossword puzzle when she normally hated crosswords, and, in short, making it plain that she was here only under duress.

No, this morning she was up and dressed almost before her eyes were open. This morning she carried her dirty clothes downstairs and deposited them in the clothes basket in the shanty on her way to the table. This morning her mother was just putting the juice and milk on the table instead of taking them off. And this morning Sarah didn't have time for the newspaper or the crosswords. This morning she was going to get a whole day's work done before lunch because this afternoon she had something better to do. She was going to visit the church and find out more about Emma.

Sarah pushed back her chair and stood up. "Where do you want me to start today?"

Her mother sputtered into her coffee cup. "Where do I...? Well, I was thinking maybe we'd gotten to the point where we should take a day to do some regular housekeeping things so they don't get too far ahead of us. Sweep the floors, wash the sheets on the beds, dust."

"I'll do the wash."

"Are you sick?"

Sarah pushed in her chair, stacked the cereal bowls, juice glasses and spoons, and carried them over to the sink. "Nope. Just have something else to do this afternoon." She turned on the hot water and shot some dish soap into it, then went back to the table for the milk.

Her mother dropped her coffee cup into the now steaming sink, stashed the cereal in the cupboard, and picked up the dishrag. "Great. I'm glad you're finally making friends." She rinsed the spoons and dropped them into the silverware drainer. "Anyone I know?"

"Nope." Sarah pushed the refrigerator door shut. Well, her mother *didn't* know Emma. All the same it was time to cut this conversation short. She headed for the shanty.

"Oh, I forgot," her mother called a minute or so later. "I'm going to the UMW luncheon with Miss Hinkle."

It wasn't until she had stripped the beds, washed the sheets and hung them out to dry, swept and dusted the living room, and was rooting around in the kitchen for something for lunch that it dawned on Sarah that her mother had been talking

about United Methodist Women, who always met at the church, and the church would undoubtedly be full of nice friendly nosey women like Miss Hinkle. Not the time to be trying to concentrate on the church records.

Sarah wrapped a piece of ham around a dill pickle and stuck them both in a hotdog bun. Bun in one hand, milk glass in the other, she wandered out to the porch and sat in the rocker.

She didn't really need the church records anymore. She bit into the sandwich. Emma's married name was Morgan. The names of Emma's children would be nice, Sarah thought taking a swig of milk. But what she really wanted to know was what happened to Emma. Did she live to be an old lady or die young?

There was another way to learn that, other than starting a scavenger hunt in Aunt Hattie's library. There was always the cemetery.

The Plainfield Cemetery wasn't anything like the cemeteries Sarah was used to at home.

Not that she was all that used to cemeteries, not having gone to very many funerals and being really good at finding something else to do when her mother put flowers on relatives' graves on Memorial Day. In fact Sarah tended to think of cemeteries as the place kids learned to drive, since her father wasn't the only one she knew who insisted his kids

practice their first starts, stops, and turns there. "At least if I get really mad we won't have far to take the body," he always joked before each session.

Sarah had come to the conclusion that cemeteries were great places for kids to learn to drive in because cemeteries, at least in the city, had miles and miles of roads that nobody ever drove too fast on. Perfect for a real beginning driver who *couldn't* drive fast enough to get out of the way.

Nobody was going to drive fast in the Plainfield Cemetery either, Sarah decided after one glimpse, since there weren't any roads to drive on. Anybody who came here in a car had to park at the gate at the end of an old dirt road and walk in. Well, first they'd have to open the rusty old gate, or, like Sarah, climb the fence. Then they had to climb part way up the hill before the graves began.

The cemetery was as neat as the ones in the city. It looked to Sarah as if somebody must mow real often. But the grave stones were so worn it was nearly impossible to read them. Several were tilted to one side and the earth over the graves was sunken down a foot or so. A couple of the headstones had been shoved to one side when a bush grew up out of the grave. One big old tree had little bits of a stone sticking out one side, like the tree had just grown right around it.

Sarah wandered around a while trying to read the names and dates. She'd heard somewhere that some people put paper

over worn old gravestones and rubbed pencils over the paper to make out the very last faint lines of what was written there. Making a rubbing, they called it. Considering all the stones she couldn't read, especially the cute little ones that looked like they were made for babies, Sarah thought she'd have to remember to bring a pad of paper and some pencils next time. Or maybe chalk or a crayon would work.

For a while she thought she might even need a rubbing to find Emma's grave, but she finally found it over near the far side of the cemetery, just before the hill dropped away and the river valley spread out and she could see miles and miles, past Plainfield. She could even make out the next town's water tower, way to the north. If Emma were alive she'd have the best view of the county a person could possibly want.

It was a double stone but Sarah could only read half of it. Emma's half.

Emma E. Rhodes, wife of Joseph Morgan. 1835-1926.

So she'd lived to be ninety, an old old woman. Probably Joseph had died a long time earlier and the extra time had worn away his name and dates.

Sarah sighed, sat down on the grass, leaned against Emma's stone and imagined what it would have been like here on this hill when Emma was her age. Block out the water towers and the sounds from the highway. Ignore the airplane overhead. Just the river and the hills and prairie grass as far as she could see.

"It is lovely here, isn't it?" said a voice in Sarah's left ear.

"It sure is," Sarah said and then realized there hadn't been anyone anywhere in the cemetery when she sat down.

Carefully, without turning her head, Sarah peeked to her left. There, next to her own khaki shorts, bare brown legs and sneakered feet, was a rumpled muslin apron, gingham skirt, and dirty bare feet.

Sarah gulped and closed her eyes. This was unreal.

She opened her eyes and looked again.

The apron was still there.

Slowly she looked at the other girl's face. And gasped.

It was the girl in the sketch.

"E-m-m-m-a?"

"I've been hoping you'd come here so we could talk," she said. "It's been so lonely. There aren't any other girls my age close by. Not at all like where we came from in Ohio."

It was Emma. As real as the rock. As the grass. As the trees.

CHAPTER SIX

"Y-y-you were expecting me?" Somehow seeing Emma wasn't surprising, but the thought that she might have been expecting Sarah was.

Emma smiled and sat crossed legged, her skirt spread neatly over her legs. "Not exactly. I mean I don't know your name so I wasn't exactly expecting you. But I've seen you across the meadow once or twice and the gypsy woman said I'd meet myself in another guise--whatever that means.

Sarah almost laughed. Gypsy woman. Then she caught herself. Who knew? Maybe there were gypsies and maybe they could tell the future. She was sitting there talking to someone who lived a hundred and fifty years ago, wasn't she? "I don't think I'm you exactly." Or was she? "I mean my name's not Emma Elizabeth Rhodes. It's Sarah Ellen Kendall. But we do look a lot alike."

"And guise must have something to do with what we're wearing--like in disguise." Emma pushed her hair out of her eyes. "You're not even dressed like a girl. I'm not sure what you are dressed like."

Sarah looked at her shorts. "Mom says even girls in Aunt Hattie's day didn't wear shorts. I suppose you haven't even heard of them?"

But Emma was already looking intently at Sarah's sneakers. "What are your shoes made of?"

"Cloth."

"I can see that. I mean the soles. That's not some odd kind of leather, surely." Suddenly Emma looked at Sarah, startled. "What do you mean even in Aunt Hattie's day? You sound like that's a long time ago and I'm too old-fashioned to know about pants like that." Emma pointed at Sarah's shorts again. "I'm NOT old-fashioned."

"No, I don't mean you are. But, uh," Oh boy. How was Sarah going to explain this? Jump in she guessed. She took a deep breath and started.

"You said something about a gypsy woman? The one who told you the future?"

Emma frowned. "Yes."

"Well, I'm FROM the future."

Emma wiped her hands on her apron and looked at Sarah strangely. Not that Sarah could blame her. She'd have looked at herself funny too. "You think you're from the future?"

Sarah tried to look innocent. "Yep."

"When?"

"Nineteen ninety--"

"Nineteen ninety!" Emma interrupted, almost shouting. She put her hands on her hips and started to laugh. "And exactly how did you travel a hundred and forty years backwards?"

Sarah decided the exact year wasn't going to make much difference. This was going to be hard enough without getting specific. Maybe explaining would help.

"The sketch in your Bible says you were married in--"

"My Bible! I don't HAVE a Bible!"

"But you will. And your brother will draw a sketch of you when you get married. I found them in Aunt Hattie's--"

"You found them?" Emma shook her head to get her hair out of her eyes. And probably to stare at Sarah better.

It was time to begin at the beginning.

"Well, you see Mom and I were cleaning house when I found your ring and I wondered who--"

"How could you find my ring?" That beginning was apparently not the right beginning for Emma. "MY ring is in the back corner of the top drawer of Mama's chest and you've NEVER been in our cabin!" She pointed off toward Aunt Hattie's.

Sarah was stumped. She felt like she was talking in a circle. Exactly where was the beginning?

"OK, OK." Sarah held out her hand like a crossing guard to stop her. "How about if I just tell what I know and you just listen? When I'm done you can ask questions. I probably won't know the answers but you can ask."

Emma folded her hands in her lap. "All right. But this better make sense."

"My mom's Aunt Hattie died this spring and left everything to my mom, so she had to come to Plainfield," Sarah pointed toward town, "and clean out Aunt Hattie's house and she decided I should come and help and when I was cleaning out this chest of drawers in the coalhouse I found this ring and--"

"--and then today I came to find the cemetery where you are buried and here you are."

For a few seconds after Sarah was done the girls sat and stared into the distance. Where was the water tower? It had been there when Sarah sat down, hadn't it? She picked up a rock the size of a pingpong ball and started rolling it between her hands like her mother rolled dough to shape it for cookies.

"I don't see a town over there, you know." Emma's voice was very quiet. Like she was trying to soothe a baby. Or a crazy person. "But your ring does look like mine."

"I'm not crazy. It really happened. I'm from--"

"The future. And I'm from the past. That's what you said." There was another pause.

"Emma?"

"Yes?"

"So whose time are we in?"

Sarah turned to look at Emma just as she turned to look at Sarah. "I think we're in yours. But we could each be in our own."

Emma grinned. "You mean if I touch you you won't be there?"

"Something like that. Maybe we're both dreaming."

"How do we find out?"

"Well," Sarah considered the rock in her hand. "How about if I put this rock down here between us and you pick it up?"

Emma looked at the rock. "If you can touch it and I can touch it we must both be here?"

"Yeah, wherever that is." Sarah laid the rock down and they both stood up slowly and stared at the rock.

"I'm sort of afraid," Emma said.

"So am I."

"What if I can't pick it up and you disappear?"

Sarah swallowed. "Then it's been a nice dream."

"It has, hasn't it?"

Very slowly Emma bent down and reached out to the rock. They both held their breaths.

Emma grabbed the rock, stood, and held the rock out. "It worked!" she shrieked. "It worked!"

"We're both here!" Sarah yelled back and grabbed her in a bear hug.

Emma hugged back, then held the rock in the air, grabbed Sarah's hand and started to do some kind of Highland fling. Sarah didn't know the step, but she jumped around all the same. First on one foot, then the other.

They danced and laughed and laughed and danced until they collapsed on the grass.

For a long time they lay there gasping and staring at the sky.

"Do you see the same sky I do?" Emma asked at last.

Sarah considered the question a minute. "Do you see that cloud right over us that looks sort of like a giant kitten all curled up?"

"Yes. Do you see the man's head with a tall hat over there to the right?"

"Sure. So whose time are we in?" They sat up, hugging their knees to their chests, and examined the land from the foot of the hill to the far horizon.

Finally Sarah broke the silence. "I think it must be yours. I can't see the town or the water tower. And when I walked up here I could hear the trucks on the highway. I can't now."

"So how did you get into my time?"

"I-I'm not sure. Maybe I'm not, really." A faint idea was creeping into Sarah's mind.

Emma let go of her knees and turned so she knelt in the grass facing Sarah, then sat back on her heels. "Then how come I can see you and talk to you?"

Sarah released her knees and sat cross-legged so she could use her hands. "Well, what if time isn't a straight line from you to me? I mean, what if it really goes round and round, like a circle and for some reason time has just come around again.."

"And you've gotten picked up, like in a dance?" Emma asked.

"It probably has something to do with being in the same place at the same ages."

"And being related."

Sarah laughed. "I'm probably the first girl in history to be able to say she's met her great-great-great-great grandmother."

"Maybe. But how do we know this hasn't happened a lot?"

"We don't. It could have. Who'd believe anyone who said it did?"

"It's getting late. I have to get back." Emma stood up and shook out her skirt. "Do you think we can meet again tomorrow? I'll come here at the same time."

"I'll be here." Sarah looked out over the valley. "You know, I read a book once about parallel universes..."

A truck shifted gears on the highway. She stopped. Emma was already gone.

CHAPTER SEVEN

At three o'clock the next afternoon Sarah ran down the road and up the hill to the cemetery. Would Emma come? Could Emma come? Did people jog in Plainfield or did she look totally stupid running down a gravel road by herself? Had yesterday been real? Sarah wasn't at all certain Emma had even been there yesterday. Could she have been dreaming? Really. A girl from 1851. The very girl she'd been thinking about, wondering about, dreaming about. The girl whose ring she'd found by chance in an old chest.

And now she was nearly an hour later than she'd promised to be. What did her mother think she was, a slave? First Sarah had to come to this place. Then she had to spend every minute cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. Thank heaven her mother was on the phone when Sarah finished sweeping the parlors. She'd probably have made her scrub the oven next.

Sarah leaned against the cemetery fence and panted. What if Emma came on time and decided it was all a dream and went back home? How would either of them ever know?

When her breathing slowed a little Sarah climbed over the fence and began trotting through the cemetery toward Emma's grave and the place where they'd met yesterday. Everything was as it should be. In the modern cemetery. And the air was so still the highway sounded closer than ever. Emma couldn't be here.

Sarah slowed to a walk when she reached the top of the hill, then stopped. This was silly. She'd dreamed it all. Emma didn't exist. She should just go home.

As Sarah turned to go the oak tree caught her eye. In her dream, if it was a dream, that tree had looked different. Smaller. And it had been right between two graves.

Sarah circled the tree slowly. Only one headstone. No sign of another-- Wait. Right there.

Sarah touched the odd square bump in the bark, then peeled a small piece away. A fleck of gray appeared. Sarah peered closer.

Could be the edge of a gravestone. It looked the same color as the one on the other side of the tree.

She touched it gently. It felt like-- She considered a moment, turned to look at a small child's stone nearby, then walked over to touch its edge. Then back to the stone in the tree.

Yes. It could be. It felt like there had been something engraved on the top. Maybe like that sleeping lamb over there. It could be a baby's grave. She circled the tree again. The edge of the stone was certainly different from the one on the other side.

If there were two stones, there were two graves. If there were two graves she hadn't dreamed it at all.

Sarah headed back to the spot where she'd met Emma yesterday. As she passed Emma's grave she saw a dark blue

dress huddled on the ground. It was Emma, her knees up under her chin.

"Emma."

Emma turned and smiled. "I couldn't find my ring, but I was afraid I'd dreamed you."

"I'm real." Sarah grinned. "I was a little worried about you, though. Whoever heard of meeting your own great-great-great-great-grandmother?"

"Nobody," Emma grinned back. "But whoever heard of a gypsy woman's prediction coming true?"

"Or a ring that connects two times?" Sarah sat down beside Emma.

They kept grinning at each other until the grins turned into laughter. They laughed and laughed until tears ran down their cheeks and they fell back on the ground exhausted.

"We -- we-- we look--" Sarah panted.

Emma gasped and held her sides. "Stupid."

"Totally." Sarah fished in her pockets for a couple Kleenex. "Here." She handed one to Emma, then wiped her eyes and blew her nose with another. They lay on their backs and stared at the sky.

"Funny handkerchief." Emma wiped her eyes with it. "How do you wash it without it falling to pieces?"

Sarah stuffed hers back in her pocket. "We don't. We throw them out and buy a new box."

Emma rolled onto her side and leaned against her elbow.

"Do you throw your clothes out too?"

"What?" Sarah faced her and leaned on her own elbow.

"Why would I throw my clothes out?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. But you aren't wearing the same shirt and pants you had on yesterday and you surely wouldn't wear clean ones everyday unless you could just throw them away. Think of all the washing. All that hauling water and heating water and scrubbing. I hate laundry."

"Oh." Sarah considered where to begin. There was so much Emma didn't know about Sarah's world. "Well, uh, we have washing machines to wash our clothes in."

"Sure. And I suppose you have drying machines, too, so you don't have to hang things up? And machines to wash your dishes? And even machines to wash YOU?"

Sarah giggled. "Dryers. And some people have dishwashers. But whoever heard of a people washer?"

"I never heard of a clothes washer. Tell me more."

"I'm not sure what you don't know."

"Anything."

"That'll take forever."

Emma looked at the sun. "We've got a while yet before I have to help Jane with supper and chores. Tell me some more."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Emma interrupted herself in mid-sentence and jumped up. "Oh, dear. It's really late." She shook out her skirt and brushed back her hair. "I've got to go. See you tomorrow, same time?"

"Sure," Sarah glanced at her watch. It was late. Nearly 6:30. Her mother would have supper on the table. Worse, she'd probably thought Sarah just skipped out on the cleaning. Sarah looked back up just in time to see Emma vanish as she passed where her own headstone would be. Was that it? She considered it while she trotted home. It had looked like Emma walked past her own stone but Sarah was sure she hadn't. It wasn't there when Emma was. And Sarah hadn't seen Emma sitting there until she'd walked past it.

As she neared Aunt Hattie's she slowed to a walk. People had walked in that spot in the cemetery before. Somebody mowed it. Maybe the ring was the connection and the headstone was the door? Just then her mother's car swooped into the drive and came to a stop.

Uh-oh. If her mother was out looking for her she was really in trouble. And what was she going to say "I was just at the cemetery visiting my great-great-great-great-grandmother and we had a wonderful time"?

But before Sarah could think of a better excuse for being late, or even open her mouth, her mother had opened the car

door and was making her own excuses. "Did you have a good afternoon? Sorry, I'm late, Sarah. It took longer just to sign a paper or two than I thought it would. Then I stopped by home."

"You went home?"

"I just ran to Des Moines to sign my loan application." Her mother smiled and scooped a pile of papers from the back seat. "No matter how many nice things we have to sell we can't start our shop without a loan. If you'll unload the computer and your bike, I'll get something together for supper."

"You went home and didn't tell me?"

"Really, Sarah, I left a note." Her mother pushed the car door shut and started for the house. "You were out having fun and I didn't see any reason to stop you. Now help with the car and we'll have supper."

"I'm not hungry."

"Fine. Unload the car." The house door slammed.

Sarah jerked open the car door and popped the tailgate. After all she'd said about wanting to go home her mother'd had the gall to go without her. Sarah pulled her bike from car, stood it beside the drive, and kicked down the kickstand. She bet her mother wouldn't have done this to precious talented Ruth or wonderful smart Luke. She grabbed the laptop computer and tucked the portable printer under her arm, then slammed down the tailgate and marched to the house.

It was tempting to just drop the computer and printer in the middle of the kitchen floor, but Sarah had a feeling a broken computer would come out of her allowance for the next zillion years. If she still had an allowance. Who knew? Maybe she wouldn't be important enough for that pretty soon either.

Well, she'd meant it about not being hungry so she stomped through the kitchen and dining room to the library, deposited her load on the mess on the desk, then ran to her room and slammed the door.

By the time Sarah left her room the next morning, her mother was in the library setting up the computer. Sarah quickly downed a breakfast of a peanut butter sandwich and a glass of orange juice and then, to avoid any chance of running into her mother, decided to leave the inside, shanty-side, coalhouse door closed and go in through the outside door instead. It probably hadn't been used since the days when the men who delivered the coal shoveled it in through that door, but Sarah was determined.

Not only was determination not necessary, but it was a good thing nobody wanted to break in, Sarah decided. A nail was all that was holding the door closed. A nail that lifted easily out of a U-shaped holder allowing the clasp to swing back. A gentle tug on the clasp and the door swung open.

Sarah stopped and stared.

She was standing in the doorway of another time. A time when the coalhouse was Emma's cabin. In the center of the room Emma was carefully setting a large stone crock on a big round oak table, pushing a huge pile of beans out of her way. It was the very table which stood in the dining room right now. If Sarah took just four steps she would run into it. But something held her back, preventing her from either moving or talking.

Emma took a large bowl from a cupboard beside the huge stone fireplace along the wall to Sarah's right, cleared a space in the midst of the bean pile and began to snap the beans, breaking off the ends, and then breaking the beans into bite-size pieces and dropping them into the bowl.

The bowl was the same slightly chipped one Sarah had just washed that morning, she realized and looked at the cupboard with interest. Was there anything else...Yes, there was the fragile teapot they'd used when Miss Hinkle came to tea. And a whole pile of soup bowls like the one she'd found in the kitchen. This was fascinating. Sarah began to take in the whole room.

She was surprised to see that the legs of the cupboard and the table stood in small pans of water. She vaguely remembered a woman at the museum her American History class visited saying people used to do that to keep the ants from getting into the food. They'd crawl into the pan and drown.

But somehow Sarah had never really thought anyone had actually done it.

The big cast iron pot hanging from a hook set into the side of the fireplace had to be the same one Aunt Hattie used as a flower pot by the driveway. Next to the fireplace was a pile of what looked like grass. Could they actually have used twisted prairie grass for fuel? She'd have to ask Emma. In the corner next to the fireplace stood a spinning wheel, its spindle covered with some kind of dirty-looking gray thread. Next to it was a chest of drawers. The very same chest where she'd found the ring, in the very same place it stood now.

Behind Emma the back door stood open, letting in the light. The cabin would be very dark when it was closed, with no electricity as Sarah had when she worked in it and only the one tiny window on the south side. Next to the back door were rough shelves filled with books and candle lamps. Through the back door a man and a boy about Luke's age, Emma's father and brother?, were hard at work building the shanty. Sarah had never thought about it before, but eight people had once lived in a house the size of her own bedroom and adding the shanty had doubled the size of their house.

Just then an older girl came into the cabin, swung the pot out of the fireplace, and began to stir whatever was cooking. "Don't forget to alternate layers of beans and layers of salt in the crock."

Emma scowled. "Don't get bossy, Jane Rebekah. I've been putting up beans almost as long as you have."

"Girls," came a soft voice and Emma and her sister looked toward the bed which took up the whole left half of the cabin, from where Sarah stood in the doorway to the back wall. Two trundle beds peeked out from under the quilt edges. A cradle stood next to it. In the wall around the bed were pegs covered with coats and shawls and bonnets and hats and dresses and shirts and overalls. The family closet. At the foot of the bed was a ladder leading to the loft where Emma and her older sister and brothers must sleep. A grey-haired woman lay very still on the bed, as though even breathing was too difficult.

"Yes, Mama." The girls spoke nearly in unison.

Jane added, "I think looking at all the beans we have left is making us tired."

"I know, honey. I wish I could..." The woman stopped with a gasp and clutched the quilt tightly a moment, then relaxed and went on but Sarah couldn't hear anymore. She had just realized that this grey-haired woman, whose teeth were rotten or missing must be Emma's mother. She looked so old, but according to the genealogy Sarah had read she was still younger than Sarah's own mother.

Sarah closed her eyes and shook her head.

When she opened them again, there was Aunt Hattie's coalhouse. Just like she remembered it. No loft. No

fireplace. No shelves. White clapboard siding on the outside. Just an old coalhouse full of old furniture.

CHAPTER NINE

Having her bike was nice, Sarah reflected as she peddled along the asphalt county road toward the cemetery. Not that she'd ever tell her mother. But it was nice to zip along, especially down the hills. Should cut getting to the cemetery almost in half.

Sarah kept up her speed as she turned left onto the gravel road. This hill should be a snap. There she'd be and wouldn't Emma be surprised?

Emma wasn't the only one, Sarah realized a minute later, as the gravel spun out from under her tires and she slid perilously close to the ditch. Sarah jerked the handle bars to the right. And landed in a heap on the road. Her father's warnings about driving on gravel echoed in her ears--"Start slow. If you give it too much gas, you'll just spin the wheels." "Ease it around the corner. Go too fast you'll end up in the ditch."

Sarah untangled herself from the bike. The same things must apply to bikes on gravel too. Nothing broken. She stood up and brushed the gravel from her shorts and examined her left elbow and knee. Not bleeding too bad. She hadn't looked like this since she was six, the last time, come to think of it, she'd fallen off a bike.

She climbed back on and started to peddle, but the gravel made it more like slogging through mud. Her legs would never

make it. She slid back off the seat and pushed the bike up the hill.

Emma was sitting in the shade of the wild honeysuckle bushes, doing something with a small pile of straw, when Sarah finally arrived, panting, at the cemetery. "You sound like you ran all the..." Emma began, then looked up and dropped what she was doing. "What is THAT?"

Sarah put down the kickstand, parked the bike, and dropped into the shade beside her. "That is a bike." She wiped the sweat off her forehead. "My means of transportation until I turn 16. Maybe forever if my parents have their say."

Emma stood and walked around the bike. "Bike?"

"Bicycle. And no, I don't know when they were invented."

"Oh, bicycle. I've heard of them. I've just never seen one before. How does this one work?"

"You just get on and peddle."

"Show me."

Sarah pushed her hair back and wearily got to her feet. "Okay. You get on sort of like on a horse."

Emma giggled. "I never saw a horse with wheels. Or so skinny."

Sarah smiled. "Neither have I. But that's the general idea, I guess." She swung her leg over the back, kicked up the kickstand, and balanced on one foot. "Then you put one foot on a pedal, push off with the other foot, and just peddle away." Sarah circled around Emma, then around the tree with

the gravestones on either side, coming to a stop in front of Emma. "Want to try?"

"Me?"

"Sure. It's easy." Sarah dismounted away from Emma.

"Come on. I'll help you balance."

"I can't swing my leg over. My skirt..."

Sarah interrupted her with a laugh. "It's wide enough. Come on. Try."

Taking a deep breath, Emma grabbed both handlebars, quickly swung her leg over the bike, straightened her skirt as much as possible, then frowned at the result.

Sarah ignored the frown. "Now put your foot on the peddle and push."

Emma lifted one foot off the ground. The bike leaned. Quickly she put her foot back.

"I'll balance you." Sarah reminded her. "Try again. This time just push off. And as soon as that peddle's down, push the other one forward and down."

"I don't think I can do this."

"Sure you can. If the five-year-old girl who lives next door to me does it, you can."

Emma bit her lower lip in concentration and pushed off. Then pushed the other peddle with her other foot, then the first peddle, then the second, first, second. Soon Sarah was running to keep up while she balanced the bike by holding on behind the seat and shouted encouragement "Steady. Steady.

Don't look down. Look ahead. Keep going. Keep going. That's it. That's it."

Suddenly Emma's laughter turned to a scream. "My skirt's caught."

"Brake," Sarah yelled.

"What?"

"Squeeze the..."

The honeysuckle loomed ahead. Emma swerved. Sarah lost hold. They both landed, with the bike, squarely in the bush.

Later, having extracted themselves and established that their injuries were limited to scratches, and righted and parked the bike, they gathered up Emma's straw and settled in the shade of the bush to cool off. Emma sat cross-legged, picked up the pieces of straw she'd been working with when Sarah arrived, and began weaving them together. Sarah sprawled on her side and watched.

"What are you making?"

"A hat. Want to learn how?"

"Not today."

"Why not?" Emma grinned. "It's easier than riding a bike."

Sarah picked up a piece of straw and started to chew it.

"What's wrong with your mother?"

"She has the summer plague. Why?"

"What's that?"

"What do you mean?" Emma paused and looked at Sarah.
"And how did you know there was anything wrong with Mama?"

Sarah explained.

When she finished Emma nodded. "That explains the door."

"You saw me? Why didn't you say anything?"

Emma examined the hat. "They'd have thought I was crazy. Besides, I didn't exactly see you. I saw a sort of shimmering. I wonder if I can visit your time."

"I didn't exactly visit."

"But you could see. I'd like to see too."

Sarah picked up a new piece of straw, rolled over on her back, and stared at the clouds. "You haven't told me about summer plague."

"There really isn't much to tell. It's chills and fever and tiredness. Papa and Jane have it too. And the baby. But Mama's the worst. She's so weak she can hardly feed the baby."

"But you father and Jane were up working ..."

Emma picked up a new piece of straw and started weaving it into the brim. "That's the funny thing about ague. It.."

"What? I thought you called it the summer plague."

"It's real name is ague, I think. Anyway, that's what's so strange about it. It kind of comes and goes. You get chills and fever or fever and chills and are real sick for a few hours. Then you're better enough to work even though you're real tired. Then it comes back. Some people get it

two or three or four times a day. Some people every few days. But it's real regular, like clockwork. Papa gets sick in the late mornings and in the middle of the night. Jane gets short spells every couple days. They just time their work around them."

Sarah chewed her straw and considered a moment. "I heard about something like that once. I can't think what it was. I'm sure it wasn't called summer plague or ague. What causes it?"

"Papa says it's the miasma."

"The what?"

"The miasma. The night air from the swamp."

"There isn't any..." Sarah sat up abruptly. "I'll bet it's mosquitoes. Do you have lots of mosquitoes?"

"Of course. Everyone has mosquitoes." Emma tucked in the last end of the last piece of straw and placed the hat on her head. "There, finished. How do you like it?"

Sarah nodded distractedly. "Very nice. Just the kind of hat they say people should always wear in the sun. Do you get bitten a lot?"

"Sarah you do say the silliest things. Of course we get bitten. That's what mosquitoes do. Bite."

"It's malaria. It's got to be some form of malaria."

"What are you talking about?"

"I read about it in school." Sarah shook her hands in frustration. "It was way back when they were building, oh,

the..." She stood up and started pacing. Her hand motions were in time with her words. "When they were building the...Panama Canal. That's it!" She stopped in front of Emma. "They were building the Panama Canal and discovered that mosquitoes carried malaria and, oh, something. Yellow fever, I think. Anyway, you get it from mosquitoes."

Emma smiled. "You're kidding."

"No. It's true. The mosquito bites you to get blood but at the same time it gives you whatever it has. If what it has makes humans sick, you get sick. Unless you've been vaccinated, but I don't think you can be against malaria. Is anybody taking anything to make them better?"

"I make them sassafras tea."

"No." Sarah made a face. "Something that really helps." She thought a minute. "I think there's something you can take for it." She turned toward the bike and in one motion mounted it, kicked up the kickstand, and started down the hill. "I'm going to go see if I can find out what it is."

Sarah stopped in the doorway to Aunt Hattie's library. Her mother was scowling at the computer screen. This probably wasn't the best time to be asking questions, but if she could help Emma she'd risk it.

"Mom?"

Her mother was too deep in bookwork to hear. She deleted an entry, scanned down a ways, typed something it, then scanned back up again.

Sarah tried again. "Mom?"

Her mother looked up and blinked. "Hi honey. Did you say something?"

"Uh, I was wondering...What do you know about ague?"

"What do I know about what?"

"Ague. A-G-U-E. I think sometimes it's called the summer plague. The settlers in Iowa got it. Could it be some type of malaria?"

"I really don't know. Maybe." She turned back to the computer.

Sarah dug the toe of her sneaker into the worn rag rug. "Well, what do you know about malaria?"

Her mother considered a moment. "All I know is my mom said Uncle Bill got it in the Pacific during World War II and he took quinine for it." She started to type again.

"When did they invent quinine?"

"Sarah, I haven't the faintest idea. There must be information in an encyclopedia or at the library. You'll just have to look it up. Now may I please get back to work?"

Sarah remained in the doorway and surveyed the room. Her mother meant the town library, she knew. But maybe some of the information was right here. If she could find it. She'd only found Emma's name by luck. Sarah wondered how her

mother had ever found an electrical outlet to plug her computer and printer into.

She started searching the shelves on the opposite side of the door from the Bibles. It appeared that the only thing organized about this library was it's disorganization -- or was that unorganization? Anyway there wasn't any. Other than the Bibles she'd found before. On this side of the door were six Agatha Christie mysteries and a couple dozen Perry Mason paperbacks, but not together. Mixed in were a bunch of ancient cookbooks, McGuffey's readers volumes three and five. want like The Hydropathic Cookbook and The White House Cookbook. A bunch of other textbooks like The New Franklin Fifth Reader and The New Century Handbook of Writing.

A dictionary soon answered her original questions. Ague was malarial. Mosquitoes did spread malaria. Quinine was discovered three hundred years ago and so Emma could probably get some. But Sarah was intrigued by the books. What else could there be?

An hour later Sarah found an entire shelf full of tiny leather bound books with gilt lettering on the covers. Who could possibly have read the tiny print inside? At the very end of the row, stuffed between the end of the bookcase and Milton's Paradise Lost was a slim worn brown leather book with no lettering at all, just a leather strap which was attached to the back and came around and slipped through a loop on the front. Carefully Sarah slipped the strap out of the loop and

turned back the front cover. On the inside, in careful faded script was "Emma Elizabeth Rhodes, her diary."

CHAPTER TEN

"Ouch!" Sarah jerked her hand away from the bush. "These things have thorns!" She examined the welt rising on the back of her hand. "Are you sure this is worth it?"

Emma dropped a handful of the pale green berries into her basket. "Haven't you ever had gooseberry pie?" She licked her lips. "It's heavenly."

"French silk pie is heavenly. These things taste terrible and it takes forever to get enough for a pie." Sarah pulled the end of a branch away from the body of the bush and gingerly reached for the berries she'd exposed, plucked a pair and dropped them in the extra basket Emma had brought. As she reached for another berry the branch slipped from her fingers and grabbed hold of her sleeve with its thorns. "Besides I don't like losing blood or clothes for my pies."

Emma giggled. "Maybe you'd better do the cleaning."

Sarah pulled the last thorn from her sleeve and examined it for tears. "That depends on how much washing these little monsters take."

"Not washing. Cleaning. You pick off the blossoms and the stems. Like this." Emma held out the berry she'd just picked and with two flicks of her other thumbnail removed the tiny brown blossom and the spot where the stem had been attached.

"Ok. I think I can handle that." Sarah settled into the shade of the bush. "At least it beats getting stabbed a zillion times."

"How much of that stuff do I try to get Mama to drink?" Emma pointed to a small stone crock next to the bush.

Sarah shook her head. "I don't know. I don't really suppose there's much quinine in tonic water. But it was the only way I could think of to get some. Are you sure you can't get any? It's supposed to have been discovered in 1600 or something."

"I don't know. I'll ask Papa if I can figure a way to explain how I know about it. Is that how it comes? In a jar like that?"

"That's just a crock we got cheese in. I thought I should put it in something like you had so nobody'd see it and wonder." She pinched off the stem and the blossom of the last berry. "I didn't think a plastic soda bottle would fit in. I wish I'd brought another basket. If I trade with you, you'll be putting not cleaned berries in with cleaned ones. If I dump yours into mine, I'll be doing the same thing. But if we had a third basket we could have one just for clean berries."

Emma started around the bush toward her. "Someone would have wondered if I'd left with three baskets. Dump these in a pile on the ground."

Sarah considered a moment. "No, I'll just ride my bike home and get a dishpan or something."

"You think you can?" Emma asked. "Go and come back again, I mean. We've never tried that."

"Sure." Sarah set the basket back down, brushed off her shorts, and headed for her bike. "We just haven't tried it all in the same day. You wait here. If I'm not back in, oh, half an hour, we'll try tomorrow."

And it did work, slick as a whistle, if Sarah did say so herself. She zipped right home, scrounged around in the coalhouse for a basket that didn't look like one Emma'd brought -- if she took one of those it might just disappear when she crossed into Emma's time or else it might disappear from Emma's hand and she didn't think Emma would care for having her hardwon gooseberries suddenly all over the ground-- and then zipped right back. Timing was perfect. There was the basket of gooseberries right where she left it.

"It worked. I'm back." Sarah parked her bike and unhooked the basket she'd brought from the handlebars. "Is this one of your baskets?" It was awfully quiet. She'd expected a little more enthusiasm over a successful experiment. "Emma?"

Suddenly something grabbed her from behind and knocked her to the ground. Sarah felt as though she'd accidentally walked into a football game. She got her knees under her and started to get up.

"What in the ..."

A hand slapped over her mouth and another shoved her back to the ground.

"Hush." Emma whispered into Sarah's ear. "Indians!"

Sarah pushed Emma's hand off her face. "At least let me breathe," she whispered back. When she felt Emma relax, she ventured to turn and look at her. Emma did look frightened so maybe this wasn't a game. "What.." she started in her normal voice, but dropped to a whisper when Emma raised her hand as though to put it back over her mouth. "..on earth is going on?" she finished.

Emma pointed down the hill away from town. "Indians."

"Where?" Sarah rose onto her knees and looked down the hill. "I don't see any... You mean those people by the creek?"

Emma knelt beside her. "We have to get home and warn them."

Sarah looked at her, puzzled. "Warn who? Why? What are you talking about?"

"Sh!" Emma was impatient. "There aren't supposed to be Indians here."

"Maybe they're just passing through."

"You don't understand. This land is open for settlement."

Sarah watched the figures by the creek for a minute. "Emma, they're just having a picnic. What's so bad about that?"

Emma motioned for Sarah to follow and then crawled backward to hide behind the gooseberry bush. Sarah felt stupid, as though she'd gotten caught in one of the neighborhood games of cops and robbers. "They aren't even looking our way. What's the big deal?" she complained.

Emma's eyes flashed with anger. "The big deal, as you call it, is that Indians kill white people. I don't want my family to end up like they did when Papa was little."

This was getting stranger and stranger. "What are you talking about?"

"My father's whole family was killed in an Indian raid in Ohio. Papa and his brother hid in the well until the next day when...."

Sarah tried again. "But Emma, those people down there-- they're just a couple women and some children. What're they going to hurt?"

Emma pulled her feet under her and gathered her skirts as though she was leaving. "There are bound to be more around here. We're going to have trouble and I've got to warn my family."

Just as she started to move away Sarah grabbed her arm and pulled her to the ground. "Listen. Telling somebody you saw Indians could cause trouble. There weren't any massacres in Iowa in your time. Don't change that."

"You're sure?"

"Cross my heart. I took Iowa history and I've read some more since I met you. Look, the only problem the settlers ever had was at the Spirit Lake Massacre and that was in 1857, a long time from now. And then the settlers were actually squatting on land where they weren't supposed to be and the Indians were considered renegades by their own people." She gasped for breath. "They certainly weren't women and children having a picnic by a creek."

Emma crept back to where she could see the creek.

"You're sure?"

"Positive." Sarah started scooping spilled gooseberries back into a basket. "I'll even double check in other history books if you want."

"I'm still going home now."

"But don't tell anyone about the Indians."

Emma dumped all the gooseberries into one basket, stacked the baskets together, picked them up and duckwalked away from where she might be seen by someone on the creek side of the hill, stood up and brushed off her skirt and apron, then started through the woods toward home. "If you're sure, I won't as long as I don't have to."

Sarah turned to watch the children playing in the creek.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

What Aunt Hattie's library needed, Sarah decided, was a real, fulltime librarian, someone to keep the books in their places. Actually someone to find their places. She already knew there was absolutely no organization to the shelves. None. And she hadn't made things any better when she'd been looking around in here before. Not that her moving books had made things worse. It just hadn't made them any better. Even what she'd thought was organization wasn't. Apparently Agatha Christie had written more than the dozen books Sarah'd found before. Christies were everywhere. Ditto the Perry Masons. And the cookbooks. And the textbooks.

How had Aunt Hattie managed to keep track of any genealogy at all with bits and pieces of it scattered all over the room? Sarah's English teacher would have a fit if she saw such messy research methods. No wonder Sarah hadn't been able to find anything which helped identify Emma as the owner of the ring.

Sarah twisted the ring on her finger and surveyed the library floor.

This time she hadn't just shoved books here and there. She'd gone at searching for Iowa history books with a method. She'd cleared the floor and carefully started a pile for each author and topic. In front of the east wall marched the mysteries, Allingham, Christie, Gardner, Marsh, MacDonald,

Millar, and at least a dozen others. In the southeast corner were years and years of Information Please and World Almanac and Farmer's Almanac. The dictionaries were piled in the northeast corner.

The cookbooks were in front of the mysteries. Sarah'd never seen so many kinds of cookbooks. And from so many time periods. Everybody who'd ever lived here must have saved cookbooks. The White House Cookbook, The Hydropathic Cookbook, The Vegetarian Cookbook, The Better Health Cookbook, The Eat Your Way to Genius Cookbook, The Flapper Cookbook, A Joy of Cooking like Mom's, and sometimes several versions of the same book. She'd found three versions of The Better Homes and Gardens Cookbook already.

Judging from the growing stacks of science fiction books over there along the west wall, Aunt Hattie was a sci fi freak. Luke would be in heaven. At least two dozen of them had titles about time travel. Could someone else have met Emma? Sarah dismissed the thought. Emma would have said. Could they have met someone else?

And biographies. How was she supposed to sort biographies? Even the city library at home couldn't have more biographies. Three Churchill, five Lincoln, four Washington, and one each of a dozen others already.

Science books. Math books. Biology. Chemistry. Physics--someone else had been fascinated with time travel and

parallel universes. Was it possible someone else had traveled too?

The medical books were the most interesting. Some were just notebooks where family members had written their favorite cures. Sarah would have to look up just what cholera was. She'd always thought it was something that killed everyone it touched, but somebody in her family had thought rhubarb could cure it.

Before she emptied a wall of shelves, the floor was covered. She wasn't going to be able to sort like this. Long before she cleared enough room on the shelves to start using them for sorting she wouldn't be able to step between the piles. She might not even be able to step over them.

Sarah picked up the dictionaries she'd dumped in the chair and sat holding them and debated what to do now. Obviously she'd have to consolidate. Biographies would be biographies. No Churchill or Lincoln or anybody piles. Should fiction just be fiction? No mysteries, sci fi, or others in particular? Dictionaries. Bibles. Those were easy.

She gazed out the window. She hadn't seen any indication that maybe Emma could come here either. Wouldn't it be fun to show her around? She asked so many questions about the future, she'd like to come and see for herself.

Sarah sighed.

"What a big SIGH for someone so YOUNG!"

Sarah jumped. Thunk! The dictionaries hit the floor. She whirled toward the doorway. "Miss Hinkle. I..."

"Didn't hear me." Miss Hinkle laughed. "My mother used to say I was the sneaking-upist girl she ever knew. I don't think she ever heard me come into a room. I'm not as good at that as I used to be but considering the mess in here it'd be a wonder if you heard a herd of elephants. What are you doing?"

Sarah put the dictionaries back in the chair and picked her way to the door. "I started out looking for history books, but this was so disorganized I thought I'd straighten as I went and..."

"It just sort of got out of hand," Miss Hinkle finished for her. "I can see how it would. Everybody in Hattie's family was a reader but nobody was an organizer. They just put their books any old place when they were finished with them and eventually the pile-up in some room or other got so bad somebody moved the whole mess in here and dropped it any which-way. I told Hattie I'd be glad to help her make this place useful but she never could see much reason except when she'd lost something for her genealogies and then she'd spend days looking for it."

Miss Hinkle paused for a breath and to consult her watch. Sarah jumped in. "Actually, I wanted something about Indians."

"Indians? Around here? There won't be much because I doubt if there's any record of them being anywhere in the area after the white folks came. I never heard anything and believe me I've heard everything. I doubt if Hattie'd have any histories anyway. Never seemed like that family was interested in history. Much more interested in the future. Even if there were books on it here I doubt you'll find them in a month of Sundays. It will be quicker to hie yourself down to the town library. I doubt if it has as many books, but they have to be better organized. I was just going to say Linda should be there right about now. We're open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons. Did I tell you I'm the librarian? If libraries as little as ours can be said to have librarians. I'm not paid of course. Linda is our only paid employee. She restocks the shelves and so on. Did all the cataloguing myself. Loved it. I could help you in here if you like."

Miss Hinkle actually stopped for an answer. Sarah wasn't expecting the pause and felt suddenly tongue-tied. "Oh, yes. Sure. I mean I'd love your help Miss Hinkle."

Miss Hinkle beamed. "Call me Ada, child."

Maybe, Sarah thought as she walked down the wooden sidewalk to the Plainfield Public Library, the library had been open other times when she'd been by and she hadn't realized it. It had always looked closed. But from the

outside it looked closed now and Miss Hinkle said it wasn't. Maybe it was the windows. With their lower halves covered by dusty faded green velvet curtains and their top halves decorated with the ornate gold lettering "Plainfield Security Bank," they looked exactly like she'd always thought old-fashioned bank windows ought to look. Except somebody had tried to scrape off "Security Bank" and paint "Library" in its place. It looked like the pictures Luke occasionally got when he forgot to wind the camera between pictures.

Sarah pushed open the door and had the eerie feeling she'd walked into that double-exposure. It was a bank but it was a library. Library shelves filled with books lined the walls and divided the desks from each other. But a short wooden railing and gate just inside the door, the wrought iron and oak teller's cage in the far corner, and the high-backed wooden desk-chairs with their padded leather backs and seats could only be from a bank. Whoever was typing was using an old-fashioned manual typewriter.

As the door closed somewhere past the teller's cage a bell rang. "Just a minute," a voice called. A few more key strokes. "Darn." A chair scraped. Footsteps.

"Hi. Can I help you find something?" A red-haired girl in cut-offs and a bright purple t-shirt stepped from behind the teller's cage.

"I, uh, well, I came for, uh..." Sarah gave herself a mental shake. Who had she expected? A woman in a long skirt

with her hair in a bun, her tiny wire-rimmed glasses perched on the end of her nose, and her fingers stained with ink from keeping books? A man in a starched collar and green eye-shade? Really, this time-travel business was getting to her. She swallowed and tried again.

"Miss Hinkle sent me. She said you might have some history books. I need something on the Indians around here at the time of the settlers." There, that sounded coherent. "Oh, I'm Sarah Kendall."

"I figured. We don't get many new people around here. Besides, Keith told us about you. I'm Linda Clarkson." The girl smiled. "You're really in luck. We got a whole bunch of history books a year or so ago when Mrs. Hampton died. She was a real history nut." Linda turned and headed back toward the teller's cage. "We keep them back here in the old safe with the diaries and stuff."

Sarah followed. They kept books in the safe? This she had to see. "Us?"

"Hm? Oh, who's the 'us' Keith told about you?" Linda held back the swinging gate to the teller's cage. "The youth group at church." She let the gate go when Sarah was through. "Somebody saw you around and Keith told us your name, that you're Hattie's niece. Stuff like that." While she was talking Linda had looped back a floor-length curtain on the wall, revealing a huge safe door, complete with a large dial in the middle.

"Are these books very valuable?"

Linda laughed and pulled the door open. "I suppose the diaries might be, but we really just keep them here because we don't have anything else to keep in the safe." She stepped in and pulled the string to turn on the overhead light. "The lock's been disabled anyway. The county histories are right up there." She pointed to a shelf just above eye level. "I think they might do you the most good since you want to know about Indians right here. The oldest ones have actual interviews with some of the people who settled here. We have a few diaries too." She pointed to another shelf. "Feel free to take stuff out to the desks to look through it. If you want to check something out there's a ledger at the teller's cage. Just write down your name, what you took out, and the date."

Sarah spent the next hour skimming through the early years of the county and learning very little she didn't know from visiting it herself. Life was hard. Game was plentiful. The first people came mostly from Ohio and Indiana.

All the authors seemed to have been curious about Indians but none of the old settlers could remember seeing any. Their Indian stories were things they'd heard, rumors which they'd had to dismiss later. Except for Spirit Lake, of course. And New Ulm. But Sarah was beginning to wonder whether anybody knew the real story about those, considering the number of

versions which even people at the time seemed to have heard. If these histories were accurate the people Emma saw by the creek probably weren't Indians at all.

Sarah returned the histories to their shelf and took down a diary. Now this might be interesting. She really hadn't had a chance to read Emma's yet. And besides, she felt a little funny about reading Emma's diary. Like she was invading her privacy. She certainly wouldn't want Emma reading her diary.

This person would never know, though. Sarah turned a few pages of the diary in her hand. It was different somehow. Wait a minute. This wasn't a diary. It was some kind of medical book. Each page had a different cure. Some didn't seem to even be for people. Some looked like they were for people but sounded terrible. Arsenic? And who'd put sugar on a cut? Or cobwebs?

"Sarah?" Linda's voice jolted Sarah out of her reverie. "Your mom's on the phone. She says she's going to Des Moines for couple days and you should either call or head back to the house."

CHAPTER TWELVE

"Going home. Going home. Going home."

The tires' chorus was music enough for Sarah as she leaned back in the passenger seat and planned the weekend.

Today was Thursday. Jenny should be home. Gab with her tonight, all night probably. Swim tomorrow, maybe a barbecue if her mother would let her. Invite the whole gang--Jenny, of course, and Michelle, Andi, Teri should be in town and Brenda was supposed to be back from her grandmother's, Stacy, Kate, even--she was feeling generous--Rachel. Then Saturday hit the Mall! Of course she'd have to go back Sunday, but meanwhile--what was it Miss Hinkle said the other day? Make hay? That's it--meanwhile make hay while the sun shines!

Let's see. What to have for the barbecue? Hamburgers and brats? Come on, why not something new and different? Polish sausage? Too spicy. Chicken? Too messy. Hot dogs on sticks? Kid stuff. Kabobs? Yuck, cooked veggies. What with? Chips? Dip? The girls were into raw veggies and dip. A cake? Too fattening. So were chips but who cared? Homemade ice cream. That's it. Didn't have to be fattening, either, if she made it with skim milk. And to drink? Mom would suggest lemonade, Sarah was sure, but it'd be diet pop. Sarah was inclined to creme soda herself but Rachel always insisted on Coke and Jenny liked Pepsi. Maybe several different kinds.

Before Sarah had gotten past the menu to how to get Ruth to loan her precious stereo, they had pulled into the driveway and were home.

Home. No wringer washers here. No piles of ancient tea towels. No clean this, sort that. Just air conditioned bliss.

"You can have the phone for half an hour and that's all," her mother said as she pulled the key from the car's ignition. "I need to catch people before they leave their offices for the day."

Sarah scrambled out of the car. When her mother said half an hour she meant half an hour, and there was so much to do. Call Jenny and set up the weekend. Jenny was such a talker that alone could take the whole time. Then she still had to invite the girls for tomorrow and catch up on the latest news. Sarah dashed in the house and down the hall, tossed her duffle through her bedroom door and made for the kitchen phone. There wasn't a moment to spare.

She dialed Jenny's familiar number and waited. And waited. And waited. What if Jenny was gone for the weekend? This wasn't when Jenny's family went on vacation was it? Sarah was about to give up.

"Hello?"

"Hey Jen, it's me. You'll never believe it. Mom came back to town for a couple days and I've got two days off for good behavior."

"Sarah! Hey guys it's Sarah!" From the sounds half the class was at Jenny's. "This is perfect. We were just talking about how it was too bad you were stuck in that cowtown for the summer. We're having a barbecue and everybody's here. Has to beat a night in Plainfield, huh? Get yourself on over."

Sarah didn't have to be asked twice. Long before her allotted half-hour was up, she was dashing onto Jenny's deck to a chorus of "Hey Sarah!" "Long time no see." "How's it feel to be in the city again?"

The next two days seemed like a dream, the dream Sarah'd had about summer before she was sentenced to Plainfield. Barbecues and swimming and lying in the sun and gossiping and just spending time with friends. The perfect summer. Like she'd never been away.

It wasn't until she stood in front of the bookstore at the mall on Saturday morning staring blankly at the display and listening to Jenny and Rachel argue about which movie they wanted to see that afternoon that it occurred to her that the whole weekend had indeed been more like a movie than a dream. Everything had been so scripted. They'd done exactly what they were expected to do, said what they were expected to say. No one had said or done anything remotely unusual or unexpected. They'd just played their parts. Emma, on the other hand.....

Suddenly her eyes focused on the books in the display. Frontierswoman, Iowa in the 1850s, A History of Iowa, Folk Remedies of Pioneer Iowa, Medicines from Wildflowers, The Worlds Between Two Rivers. Emma! She'd promised to let Emma know about the Indians.

Jenny touched her arm. "You choose, Sarah. We can come anytime but you're going back in the morning."

Sarah glanced at her watch. "Uh, guys, I can't make the movie. I have to get to the library."

"You have to what?" The girls stared at her in horror.

"That village must have affected your mind." Rachel slipped on her sunglasses and peered over them and down her nose at Sarah in her best sophisticated-snob act. "This is summer, Sarah, in case you've forgotten."

Sarah shook her head. "No, there's something I gotta look up before it closes. I'll catch up with you later."

Rachel pushed her glasses back on top of her head. "Not tonight. Jen and Jeff are going to a frat party with Lon and me tonight."

"I'm sorry, Sarah. We planned this weeks ago. If I'd known sooner you were coming..." Jenny smiled. "But let me know when you're coming back to stay."

Sarah woke up Monday morning with a jerk as though she'd loud noise. She took a few deep breaths to slow her heart and listened. She could have sworn somebody called her name. But

the house was quiet, no one else was up. A bad dream? Her glance settled on the books piled on her dresser and she leaned back against the pillows.

She hoped Emma would be satisfied now. She'd spent Saturday afternoon at the library and brought more than a dozen books home. It had rained all day Sunday making it a perfect day to curl up with a good book. Sarah had staked out one of the big recliners in the living room, stocked the table with soda, popcorn, notecards, pens, and the pile of books from the library and set to work, only coming up for air when someone stood in her light and announced a meal. Her nose in the book she'd made her way to the table, absently eaten whatever was before her, then read her way back to the chair.

It really hadn't taken long to prove Emma hadn't a thing to worry about. There just weren't any discussions of Indians at all in Iowa during the 1850s, except for three things everybody had something to say about -- the Mesquakie buying land and returning from Kansas in 1857; the Wahpeton Sioux renegades killing settlers in the Spirit Lake Massacre, also in 1857; and Indians killing settlers at New Ulm, Minnesota, in 1862. The reasons for the massacres varied depending on when the book was written. Everybody modern thought the Mesquakie were brave. And if there were Indians around the rest of the time nobody had thought it was worth commenting

about, at least not the white settlers who recorded such things.

It was the stuff about early pioneer medicine though, that was fascinating. Sarah'd read every word she could find relating to illness and disease or medicine. The state of sanitation during the 1800s had been astounding. How many diseases had spread just because they didn't know to wash their hands or keep the outhouses away from the drinking water? She'd have to explain it all to Emma. They wouldn't want to get cholera or typhoid.

And the "science" of medicine had certainly been hit or miss. Some of the things they'd tried were just too awful for words. It was a wonder anybody had survived at all.

Someone was coming down the hall. Sarah burrowed down in her bed, the covers over her head. Maybe whoever it was would think she was still asleep. Especially if it was Luke. She wasn't ready to let him know the very best part of the weekend had been the conversation they'd had last night. It simply wouldn't do to let him think they were on the same wavelength. Even if for the first time in her life she suspected they were.

Luke had been sitting in the other recliner reading since lunch but he always sat there, sometimes long into the night, when he was engrossed in something. When Sarah'd ever bothered to notice it seemed to be one of those combination science fiction-westerns, where the astronauts acted like the

cowboys in old westerns, shooting up planets in the name of truth and justice. Mostly Sarah tried not to notice.

But yesterday, when Sarah had finally closed the last history book and was trying to work the kinks out of her neck, the title of Luke's book had leapt right across the room at her Parallel Universes: The Answer to the Time Travel Question. "Uh, say, Luke, do you believe in time travel?"

He'd frowned at her over the top of his book. "And if I do?"

Oops. She'd tried to keep from sounding too eager and ended up sounding like she was making fun of him. "Oh, nothing. I mean I read something somewhere that made it seem possible. You know. Somebody went somewhere where her great-great-whatever-grandmother'd been and, well, they met. Like there wasn't any time." Sarah pushed her hair back and bit her lip. "Then I saw your book and I just wondered if you thought it was possible. I mean it seemed like the person was telling the truth."

Luke put his book down and looked at her like he'd never seen her before. "Yeah, I guess I think it's possible. Nobody's ever claimed to do it, but that doesn't mean someone hasn't."

"Maybe nobody talks about it because people'd think he was crazy." Sarah grinned. "Maybe somebody has and they thought he was."

"Yeah." Luke leaned forward and stared blankly at the far corner. "It would prove the wormhole theory, I guess, if it happened like that. Maybe." He bit his lip and rubbed his forehead, as though he were pushing back hair, if his hair had been long enough to push back. For an instant he looked a little like Emma. "Or parallel universes."

Sarah giggled. "Wormholes?"

"A shortcut between times. Some people think a black hole will be like that. And some people think that even if wormholes exist we couldn't survive going through them."

"What do you think?"

Luke shrugged. "I don't know. I'm inclined to think its more like, well, what little I know of quantum physics. All times are possible all the time. We're all right here but if we decide we're in one time that cancels out all the others." He frowned. "Decide's not the right word."

Sarah sighed, remembering. It had been great, talking with Luke on that level. So, so, stretching. Her mind almost tingled. Like she felt when she'd exercised just the right amount. Sometimes a really good teacher made her feel like that. She hadn't realized even brothers could do it. And that parallel universe bit. That made sense. Maybe her mother would swing by the bookstore when they left this afternoon and she could get...

Emma. That was it. Sarah jumped out of bed. She needed to see Emma. She had to get back to Plainfield.

"I never thought I'd see you in a hurry to get back here," her mother commented as they pulled into Aunt Hattie's driveway an hour and a half later. "And at seven in the morning, too. Being in the country has really changed your sleepyhead image."

"Thanks, Mom." Sarah jumped out of the car as soon as it stopped moving and ran around to the back. When her mother popped the tailgate latch, she flipped the gate up and grabbed her backpack and duffle and dashed to the house. She ran across the house and up the stairs, dropped her pack and duffle in her room, and was back again before her mother could get her own suitcase and briefcase in the house.

"And so polite, too," Sarah's mother said when Sarah held the door for her. "We should have come to Plainfield more often when you were little."

"Yeah." Sarah took the back steps in one leap, and loped off toward her bike, which she'd left by the coalhouse door. What was that funny shimmer?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Sarah practically ran into Emma who was pacing back and forth outside the cabin. "I thought you'd never come. Where have you been?" she shouted in Sarah's face.

Sarah took a step backward. "I-I went home to see my friends." She'd never seen Emma so upset. "I found out something that..."

But Emma wasn't listening. "Why didn't you tell me? I thought you were coming right back and you didn't and...and the baby died and now we can't find Matthew anywhere and it's your fault."

"My fault? I'm sorry about the baby but I just went..." Sarah bit her lip and pushed her hair off her face. "Look, Mom was going to Des Moines for a couple days and if I wanted to go I didn't have time to find you. I didn't know we could call to each other." She smiled at Emma. "I heard you, you know. All the way back from Des Moines I knew you wanted me."

Tears welled in Emma's eyes. "You mean you forgot me until you were coming back. How do you suppose that makes me feel? I can't go home." She choked back a sob.

"Emma," a weak voice called from the cabin. "Who are you talking to? Is Papa back from the field?"

Emma held her hand to her mouth as though to hold back her words, closed her eyes, swallowed, then turned her face

toward the cabin door. "No, Mama. I'm just talking to myself."

"You know you shouldn't do that, sugar. People might think you're crazy." It sounded like her mother tried to laugh. A dry raspy laugh, almost a cough.

"I know, Mama. I'll try not to." Emma turned back to Sarah and lowered her voice to nearly a whisper. "What does my diary say about Matthew?"

Sarah was puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Where did the Indians take him? Do we get him back?"

"The Indians?" Sarah's voice rose.

"Shh! She'll hear you."

"Nobody can hear me." Sarah whispered back. "I told you, you don't have to worry about the Indians."

"Matthew's missing. How do you explain..."

"Emma?" her mother called. "When Matthew gets tired of playing down by the creek tell him to come on in and read to me. We can't let the teacher think he's just a dummy when he starts school." She cleared her throat. "I hope Thomas is making Papa get his rest. He's just getting over the fever."

"I hope so too, Mama. And I'll tell him as soon as he comes back." Emma grabbed Sarah's arm and steered her away from the cabin, toward the garden and the woodpile. "She doesn't know Matthew's missing. How am I going to tell her? She's so sick."

Sarah pushed Emma's hand off her arm. "How do you know he's not just off playing somewhere? Maybe he went somewhere with Jane. Maybe he's out with your father."

"You don't understand. He was supposed to stay with me. I've already checked the field. He's not there. Jane and Mandy and Thomas and Papa are but Matthew's not." Emma took a deep breath. "I'm going to have to tell Papa about the Indians."

Sarah stared at Emma in horror. "But I told you they didn't do anything. I did look, Emma. I even went to the library and looked through everything I could find. I didn't find anything."

"Maybe you missed something. Or maybe one little boy wasn't enough to make the history books."

Sarah ran her hands through her hair. Had she missed something? Had there been Indian trouble and in skimming through those books and getting sidetracked by all the old remedies had she missed an abduction? Abruptly Sarah sat on log next to the chopping block.

"Listen to me." Emma grabbed Sarah's shoulder and shook her hard. "The diary. What does it say?"

"I don't know. I haven't read that, I mean, this far."

"Why on earth not? I would if I could." Her face brightened just a little. "Go back right now and read it. Then come back here and tell me."

Sarah shook her head. "I can't do that."

"Matthew's missing and you won't go find out what happened so maybe we could save him?"

"It might change history. That wouldn't be right."

Suddenly Emma leaped onto Sarah, knocking her to the ground, sitting on her stomach, and pinning her arms at her sides. She leaned forward and screamed in Sarah's face. "I don't care about your history. It's my future."

Sarah squirmed and twisted and kicked. Her arms wouldn't move. Her legs got her nowhere. Emma was a lead weight on her stomach. "Get off me," she gasped. "I can't breathe."

Emma shifted her weight completely onto Sarah. Tears were rolling down her face. "We can't leave him out there," she screamed. "That's what wouldn't be right."

Sarah coughed hollowly and tried to inhale. "Get off."

"Why? What have you done for me?" Emma gave a little bounce. "You tell me mosquitoes cause ague, but what good does that do? Nathan died anyway. Mama's still sick." Her voice was getting raspy from screaming.

"Get off." Tears streamed from Sarah's eyes. Could this kill her? What would happen if she were died or hurt here? She tried not to panic.

"Now you say the Indians didn't do anything but Matthew's missing. If you're really from the future you should be able to help me." She bounced again and began sobbing. "Help me."

Sarah licked her lips and sucked in what little air she could. "Get...off." It took a breath for each word. She "I'll...go."

Emma relaxed her hold on Sarah's arms and slumped off onto the ground, sobbing. "Help me, Sarah. You've got to help me."

Sarah took a deep breath. Then another. Everything seemed to work. Her arms felt tingly. Emma must have cut off the circulation. She sat up, flexed her arms to get some feeling back, and took another deep breath. "I'm going right now." She pushed Emma's legs aside and stood up. "I'll find out what I can and be right back. You better pull yourself together. This might be hard to explain if your mother wants you or somebody comes back." She pushed her hair back and brushed off her shorts. "I'm not sure how I'm going to explain getting my back dirty." She reached out to help Emma to her feet.

Emma shook out her skirt and brushed off Sarah's back. "Why not just bring my diary back? I'll read it and then I'll be the one who changes things."

"I don't know if that'll work. The ring's the only thing I've been able to bring back that belongs here." Sarah shrugged, doubtful. "I can try." She looked around the yard. If the cabin was there then she'd come around the corner of the house...there. Sarah walked toward where the corner must be.

And walked.

Nothing.

Sarah turned and looked back. This had to be right. But it wasn't. Nothing was happening. She looked around. Yes. When she came around the corner of the house she'd been at this angle to the coalhouse and closer by a good twenty feet.

Emma still stood by the woodpile, a puzzled look on her face. "Maybe..." She stopped and looked toward the cabin. Now would not be a good time for her mother to hear. She moved closer to Sarah. "Maybe you need to be coming from the direction you were walking in. Go toward the cabin and try again."

Sarah nodded and sighed in relief. That was it. "I thought it was just the spot, but maybe you're right and it's the angle too." She walked toward the cabin, then turned and walked back.

Nothing.

Sarah swallowed and licked her lips. She felt sick at her stomach. She looked at Emma. Emma looked like Sarah felt. Scared. Going and coming had always been so easy. What was happening?

. Without a word Emma went back to the doorway of the cabin, right where she'd been when Sarah first saw her. Carefully Sarah lined herself up to Emma and the cabin. There. That's how it looked.

Sarah turned and started for the corner of the house once more. Slowly. Don't rush.

Ten feet to go.

Five. "If this works, I'll meet you in the cemetery."

Three.

A shimmer.

Ooof! She'd walked into the side of the car.

Half an hour later Sarah leapt off her bike at the cemetery and was shouting to Emma even before she'd passed the headstone. "He's at the pond!"

Chapter Fourteen

Someone was thrashing weakly in the center of the pond.

Emma screamed and ran toward the pond. "Matthew. It's Matthew. We have to get him out of there. He can't swim." She stumbled and sobbed, then ran on.

When she reached the water's edge her running slowed slightly as the mud caked her shoes and the water began to drag at her skirts.

Suddenly Sarah realized that Emma meant to wade clear out to Matthew. "Stop!" she yelled and tore off her sneakers, tossing them onto the bank as she ran into the water after Emma. "Stop!"

Sarah grabbed Emma's arm. "Don't. You'll drown. You have to go get help."

Emma jerked out of Sarah's grasp and sat down with a "Splat!" Struggling to her feet, she panted "I have to get Matthew out of there." She headed back toward the middle of the pond.

Sarah grabbed at her again. "Don't you understand?" she screamed. "Your skirt will drag you down. You can't swim in it. You can't help him."

Sarah waded in front of Emma and tried to turn her aside but Emma didn't seem to see her. "I have to get Matthew. I have to get Matthew." she kept saying. "I have to get Matthew. I have to get Matthew. I have to get Matthew."

Sarah dug her toes into the muddy ground for leverage, then grabbed Emma by both shoulders. "OK," she shouted. "I'll bring him in. Go back." Then, without waiting to see whether Emma responded or not, she turned and dove into the water toward Matthew.

As the water closed over her head, Sarah automatically opened her eyes. And was amazed.

The pondscape before her was nearly as clear as the landscape she'd left. The rocks and fish stood out in the sunlight. There wasn't any of the dirt and scum she remembered from the one time she and Jenny had gone swimming in a lake and gone home to stand in the shower until Mom threatened to turn off the water if she "didn't get out right this minute." Why this water seemed clean enough to wash her hair in. Finding Matthew from under water should be a cinch.

Sarah took two strong breast strokes and frog kicks, then turned on her side to look for Matthew. There he was, right above her.

She surfaced and turned Matthew onto his back in one smooth motion. Then, grabbing hold of his shirt with one hand and using the frog kicks and what stroking she could get out of her free arm, Sarah towed him toward shore.

As soon as Sarah's feet could touch the bottom of the pond she stood, tilted Matthew's head back just a little with one hand pushing down slightly on his forehead and pinching his nose closed and the other hand lifting his chin up

slightly, took a deep breath, and blew into his mouth. Walking sideways toward land, dragging Matthew with her, she turned her head and listened for his exhale.

Nothing.

Pushing down slightly more on Matthew's forehead neck so she could maintain his head tilt with one hand, Sarah wrapped her other arm around his chest. Then she took another deep breath, blew into his mouth again, squeezed him against her body, released the squeeze, turned her head, and listened.

Nothing.

Sarah stumbled and fell and they reached land, but dragged Matthew onto the ground with his head out of the water, knelt beside him, and tried once again.

This had seemed so easy when she did it on the big rubber doll in Life Saving Class. What was her name? Fanny? No, Annie. That's it.

Do it just like on Annie, Sarah told herself. Was there something different she had to do in a drowning? Never mind. No time. Pinch his nose. Tilt his head to straighten his airway. Put a hand on his chest. Take a deep breath. Blow strongly into his mouth. Don't straighten up. Just turn your head and push down on his chest. Listen. Was there something? Maybe. Maybe a little gurgle.

Take another breath. Blow into his mouth. Push on his chest. Listen.

Definitely a gurgle this time. And water in his mouth.
It was working!

Sarah quickly tipped Matthew onto his side, let the water run out of his mouth, then pushed him onto his back again. Pinch. Tilt. Breath. Blow. Push. Listen.

That's it! A breath!

And then, just as Sarah was taking a deep breath to breathe for him again, Matthew coughed, coughed again, and inhaled on his own.

"He's alive!" Emma shouted in her ear.

Matthew opened his eyes and Sarah closed hers as everything began to shimmer.

When Sarah opened her eyes again Matthew and Emma were gone and she was staring at a herd of cows drinking placidly from the pond, their tails waving away flies in a slow rhythm. The white cow nearest her turned its head lazily in her direction, rather like a high-society matron noticing the waitress. The black circle around its left eye reminded her of a monocle. Sarah couldn't believe what she was thinking. She'd seen this cow somewhere before.

Just as Sarah was wondering how to get out of the field without drawing any more attention to herself--did cows stampede?--something cold and wet bumped her right elbow.

Sarah gulped and edged a little to the left, watching the cow for some sign.

A bump from the left.

She started to move a little more, but stopped. Had they surrounded her? She was afraid to look.

Another bump.

This was ridiculous. If they'd surrounded her she'd be better off knowing. Sarah took a deep breath and slowly turned her head to the right, maintaining eye contact with the white cow until the very last instant.

She couldn't believe her eyes. Sarah glanced to the left.

And nearly giggled with relief.

She was surrounded all right, by two calves, one black, one white. Almost as quickly as she'd looked at them they dashed toward the white cow, who reached out to nuzzle them.

Sarah shivered in the hot sun. She'd seen that cow with these odd black and white twins in a photo at Aunt Hattie's. Where was she? No, WHEN was she?

She could taste the bile at the back of her throat and swallowed. Hard. There wasn't time to throw up. She had to get out of here.

Sarah tore her gaze from the white cow and her calves and looked around. All the cows had calves nursing. She twisted the ring.

She took a step backward. Surely they wouldn't pay any attention if she left now.

Another step. Then another and another. The cows munched. The babies nursed. Good.

Sarah turned and ran.

Across the field. Over the fence. Across the next meadow. Up the hill. She hoped this was how Emma had come from the cemetery. She hadn't planned on trying to find her own way back.

Through the woods. They seemed different now, but they would be, wouldn't they, in a different time.

Yes. There it was.

Panting and gasping and sobbing Sarah ducked between the rails of the cemetery fence. She paused a moment to orient herself.

Yes, there was the tree marking the family plot.

Sarah followed the fence around the edge of the cemetery. She had to be careful. If she didn't come past Emma's stone just right who knew what would happen?

OK. Now she was here. The plot looked different. The baby's headstone was just being swallowed by the tree. Aunt Hattie's grave was missing. And Sarah's own grandparents'. But Emma's mother and father were here. And Jane and her husband. And baby Nathan. And Matthew.

Sarah squinted at the date. It was almost gone. 1863? 1865? Did he die in the Civil War? She'd have to come back and do a rubbing. Or maybe it was in some of Aunt Hattie's stuff. If she ever got back home.

She moved toward Emma's stone. Something was different about it. Emma's birthdate was there but...

What if...?

No. She swallowed the bile again. Don't think. Don't rush. Just go.

Sarah closed her eyes and stepped past the stone.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

When Sarah opened her eyes a moment later the world looked normal again. Her bike leaned against the tree with the headstone sticking out. The date on Matthew's stone was entirely gone. She leaned over and touched it with her finger. Even a rubbing wouldn't work now. She'd have to ask Emma.

Sarah shook her head. She couldn't ask Emma. Emma wouldn't know yet. Besides....Sarah turned and considered Emma's stone. Something seemed to be wrong with the time travel now. Maybe she shouldn't try seeing Emma. But how could she stop seeing the best friend she'd ever had?

The sound of a car engine cut through the stillness. A car stopped at the cemetery gate, an old woman in a huge floppy hat and flowered denim coveralls climbed out of the driver's seat, pulled a large basket from the car trunk, unlocked the cemetery gate, and began to walk slowly up the hill. It was Miss Hinkle! Sarah wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "Hi, Miss Hinkle."

Miss Hinkle shaded her eyes with her hand against the sun. "Why Sarah Kendall. Fancy meeting you here. Did you come to find your family's plot? Hattie always said you'd take an interest in your family history someday but I never....I come out here once a month or so in the summer to trim around my family's stones. Years ago I even used to

plant flowers and things but I'm getting too old for that. These new silk flowers are just my style now."

While Miss Hinkle talked she stopped near a large elaborate stone marked "Hinkle," set down her basket, and eased herself to her knees. Then she began taking things out of the basket and setting them on the ground. A pile of silk flowers, grass shears, a thermos, a cup, a rag, and a pair of black and white striped gardening gloves, which Miss Hinkle pulled on.

"So, Sarah, how's your mother coming with her plans to start a shop? Last time I talked to her, last Tuesday I think, she was hoping the loan would come through pretty soon and I noticed you were both gone over the weekend. Did you go home to sign papers? We're really looking forward to a new business in town, you know."

It occurred to Sarah that she could help Miss Hinkle but she'd have to ask what needed to be done and with Miss Hinkle that was always impossible.

Miss Hinkle finished clipping the grass in front of the stone and moved around to the side. "Arthur is very good about mowing the cemetery but he just won't get down and do the detail work. You do know Arthur, don't you? He's janitor at the church and the town handyman. A little slow in the head but harmless and the world's best worker. Jack Johnson, Keith's dad, you know, who runs the hardware store, gave Arthur one of those string trimmer things and he just loves it

but it just doesn't trim like getting down on your hands and knees with the shears can and besides it makes such a mess."

While she talked she'd crawled around to the back of the stone and was nearly ready for the final side. "Anyway, what was I talking about? Oh, yes. Your shop. You aren't the only new business in town you know. We're becoming quite a thriving metropolis. A developer from over near Elm Grove has bought the land around the pond and is starting some big expensive houses. I'd say he was crazy but Leroy, that's the mayor, says they're already sold to folks who want to live out a ways. And Elsie Shoemaker, that's Arthur's sister, he lives with her you know, told me there's talk of the Historical Society putting together a museum in the old hotel and reopening the restaurant there.

Miss Hinkle finished the clipping, dropped the shears into the basket, and flipped a metal piece in the front of the base of the stone over. A vase was buried there. Quickly she arranged the flowers in it then dusted the stone with her rag and poured herself a cup of water. "Would you like a drink child? I'd imagine you're thirsty if you rode your bike all the way out here in this heat."

The water did taste good. As Sarah would have said if she could have found a gap to say it in. But Miss Hinkle was running merrily on.

"Could you help me up, child? Just grab my elbows and lift. I don't think I'm too heavy for you. Not like I was

when I was younger. That's it. When I'm alone I use the stone to pull myself up but it's much easier with help." Miss Hinkle repacked her basket, which Sarah managed to grab and carry for her back down the hill.

"You'd never know it to look at me now but I was quite an athlete when I was younger. My father was so embarrassed. His daughter the bicyclist and the swimmer. Though he found the swimming easier to take than the bicycle I think. Hattie and I swam over at the pond where only the cows could see us but we rode our bicycles everywhere. Over to Elm Grove and out to Potter, which isn't there anymore, of course, and down to Miller's Grove. We made plans once to ride to the city but Papa found out and that was the end of that."

Sarah put the basket back in the trunk, shut the lid, and opened the car door for Miss Hinkle.

"You're such a nice girl Sarah. And you do get along so well with everyone. I've commented on that to your mother." Miss Hinkle turned the key in the ignition and stomped on the gas. She was still talking, but with the engine roaring Sarah could no longer hear so she stepped back and waved. With a jerk and another roar Miss Hinkle backed down the lane.

When Sarah got back to Aunt Hattie's the phone was ringing and great "THUNKS" were coming from the library. Sarah opted for the phone. By the time she'd hung up, the

"THUNKS" had ended and she felt safe peeking in the library door. It looked like a cyclone had just been through.

Her mother sat on her heels near the far window holding the end of an extension cord. "I'm afraid you're going to have to sort all over again. I was just going to plug this in back here so I could plug in the printer. When I moved this pile of books, well, now you can see what they mean by "domino effect."

Sarah began piling up the books nearest her. "Maybe this better be my next job, huh?"

"Actually, I have another job for you." Her mother stuck the plug into the outlet and began piling books over there. "Just help me make a path to the door. I think we're ready to start cleaning up the house."

"I thought we had been cleaning house."

Her mother laughed. "We've been sorting stuff. There's a difference. Now we're ready to start making this place livable. Tomorrow I start stripping wallpaper in the dining room and you and Keith pull up the old linoleum in the kitchen and bathroom. Unless that was Keith on the phone saying he can't come?"

"Not exactly. Well, it was Keith, but he wanted to know if I'd like to come on a picnic with the UMYF tonight."

"A Linda called about the same thing a little while ago. She said you knew her and should just meet them at the church at 4 if you're going."

Sarah was quiet for a minute or two as she finished the narrow path to the door. "I think I'll go if it's okay."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

By Sunday afternoon, when she lay in the front porch swing reading the church history Linda found for her in the library, Sarah had almost convinced herself that she hadn't really been caught in a time between Emma's and now. Her imagination had just gotten away from her. After all she'd been reading every history book she could get her hands on and looking through boxes and boxes of Aunt Hattie's old photos of everything including cows and other farm animals and she'd been exhausted from pulling Matthew out of the pond. Besides all her life she'd seen cows around farm ponds. How many of those had been black or white or black and white?

It had to have been imagination. She'd met Emma at the cemetery nearly every afternoon this week and there hadn't been a single shimmer. Just midsummer heat and puffy white clouds and talking and dreaming.

Sarah had just finished the chapter on the first circuit riders and turned to the biography of the first minister who'd actually lived in Plainfield when her mother spoke to her through the screen door.

"Sarah, I know it's asking a lot but would you wash a load of whites for me? I need my good..." Her mother stopped when Sarah looked up from her book. "Do you feel all right? You look pale."

"Just a little headache from reading. What do you need washed?" Come to think of it, she was feeling a little headachy and, well, a little pale the last few days. Probably all that evil smelling glue she and Keith had been soaking off the kitchen floor after they'd pulled the worn old linoleum up. That or the paint remover they'd been using on the dining room floor. The last few days made cleaning out the coalhouse seem like a pleasant dream. Worry didn't make people pale. Besides she wasn't worrying anymore.

"If you're sure. I need my good white blouse. The one I wear with my navy suit." Her mother shifted her armful of quilts. "I need to go see the bank one last time tomorrow. Do you want to come?"

Sarah was opening her mouth to accept when it hit her. She had no desire to go at all. This was home. "No," she grinned. "I think I'll stay here. Linda says they're having a hay ride tomorrow night. Maybe I'll go."

Her mother's eyes lit up. "Hey, that's great! I mean, it's nice to hear you're making friends. I mean," she stumbled again, "I'm glad you're..."

"I know," Sarah laughed, marking her place in the book and uncurling from the swing. "I've been a real drag haven't I?"

"You've been fifteen. Thanks for doing my blouse." Her mother turned to go, then turned back. "You know, I hope,

that if this loan goes through we'll be staying here. Permanently."

"I know. It's OK."

It was more than OK, Sarah thought as she set the history book on the edge of the old pie safe and put the ring and her watch on top of it. She wasn't quite ready to say she wanted to stay, but, well, *almost*. She uncoiled the hose, hooked up the washer, and started the water. Linda was going to be a good friend. And even though Keith was always going to be the boy next door, Sarah smiled at the expression, he had friends, didn't he?

Sarah turned on the agitator, added laundry soap, dumped in her mother's blouse and the rest of the load, and started swishing things around with the paddle. And then there was Emma. She glanced at the history book she'd been reading. If only Emma didn't want to know so much about the future. It couldn't be good for her. What if she knew things and told people and they thought she was crazy?

Sarah stared across the room and out the window. On the other hand Emma had believed what Sarah told her this week about germs and if she kept her family from getting sick during the next cholera or typhoid epidemic, who cared if people thought she was crazy for boiling water and milk and the buckets.

"Sarah, am I in your time?"

Startled, Sarah focused her eyes on the figure in front of her. "Emma, you've never come to see me before."

"I didn't know I could." Emma looked at the dishpan in her hands. "I just stepped out to empty this on the garden and here I am." She peeked over the edge of the washer. "Is this the clothes washing machine you were telling me about?"

Sarah looked at the dishpan of dirty water. "Yeah. Here, let me get rid of that and I'll show you how it works." She took the dishpan from Emma intending to take it out through the back porch to the present garden. As she turned she glanced at the coalhouse door and froze.

"Emma?"

"Hm?"

"Emma, look."

"I am looking. I wish we could have one of these. What's this cord-thing for?"

Carefully, without taking her eyes off the coalhouse doorway, Sarah balanced the dishpan on her hip with one hand, then touched Emma's arm with the other. "No, I mean look at the door. I can see Jane sewing by the window in the cabin."

"You're right." Emma laughed. "I never noticed that before when you went from one time to the other."

"It hasn't been like that. I just went." Sarah licked her lips. She was getting very thirsty, suddenly. "I don't think it's supposed to be like this."

Emma voice dropped to a whisper. "Are we getting time mixed up?"

"I don't know. Something's wrong." Sarah thrust the dishpan at Emma. "I think you'd better go back. I'll meet you at the cemetery in an hour."

"It's fading."

"I know. Hurry."

The few seconds it took Emma to cross the shanty seemed like an hour. The cabin, which had seemed so clear when Sarah first saw it, was not only fading, it was shimmering. Sometimes it was the coalhouse. Cabin. Coalhouse.

Emma hesitated.

Cabin.

"Go, Emma."

But just as Emma stepped down into the cabin it changed again.

To a coalhouse full of coal.

Before Sarah could call out the coalhouse had changed again and the shimmering stopped.

Emma was gone.

Slowly, almost on tiptoe, as though she were afraid sound would set it off again, Sarah approached the doorway. She reached out and touched the doorjamb gingerly.

Solid all right. She looked around her. Everything looked normal. The hose from the washer snaked into the house, just as she'd laid it out not an hour ago. Her book

with her watch and the ring lay on the pie safe shelf. The pile of dirty clothes she'd brought down from the bedrooms yesterday morning leaned against the old milk sterilizer. The shanty was Sarah's own version.

Sarah bit her lip and tried to breath normally. Her heart was still thudding as though she'd run a mile and she felt like throwing up.

At least she knew where she was. Maybe Emma was here too.

Holding onto the doorjamb, Sarah leaned into the coalhouse and tried to peer through the darkness. There, to the left, the old milk buckets were piled where she'd left them. And beyond them was the steamer trunk with its dozens of labels. To the right she could barely make out the huge old dresser and headboard which could only have come from the master bedroom. The baskets Emma had used for picking gooseberries hung above them. But she couldn't see farther without the light and she was afraid to cross the floor to the string. What if the shimmering started again?

"Emma?" Her voice sounded more like a croak than a whisper. And why was she trying to whisper anyway? She cleared her throat.

"Emma?"

The washer ground to a halt. It was time to wring out and hang up. But Sarah stayed where she was and listened.

Nothing. Not even the slap of the lilac bushes against the house.

"Emma, please answer me." She would, wouldn't she, if she were here?

Yes, she would, Sarah decided, pushed herself away from the doorjamb, and turned toward the washer. If Emma were there she'd know it was Sarah and answer. She didn't answer and the cabin had looked right just as she stepped, therefore she wasn't here, she was there.

Except...

Sarah looked back at the doorway. Except she might be too afraid to say anything. Sarah swallowed. She'd just have to go in there and check.

Before she could think about it again, Sarah stepped through the coalhouse door and ran down the steps and across the floor, grabbed the light string and yanked.

The light flashed to life and Sarah turned slowly around.

No Emma. She must have made it home.

Or was she in one of those other coalhouses that had flashed by when the doorway shimmered? Sarah shivered.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Sarah snapped the last clothespin in place as she grabbed the empty clothesbasket and raced for the house. That had to be the fastest wringing out and hanging up in history. She dashed up the back steps and onto the porch, letting the door slam behind her, slid across the porch and into the shanty, tossed the basket into the corner with one hand while scooping up her watch and the ring with the other. She turned, ran back across the porch, caught the door as it rebounded from the slam, leaped down the steps and onto the bike parked at the bottom, and pedaled furiously down the drive and onto the road.

What was she going to do if Emma wasn't at the cemetery? What if Emma never got home? What if she was in some other time? How would Sarah ever find her?

Oh, please Emma, be at the cemetery. Be there. Be there. Be there, Sarah prayed in time to her pumping feet.

It was only as Sarah parked her bike near the cemetery fence and raced up the hill that another thought occurred to her.

Her pace slowed to a trot, then a walk. What if the ring didn't work right? What if the shimmering happened here? What if she ended up somewhere, no, some time when she couldn't come back?

Sarah passed the first of the family headstones, Great-Great-Grandfather Rhodes, Aunt Hattie's father. Nothing yet.

Aunt Hattie's with its pile of dried bouquets. Nothing.

The tree with the headstones in it. No shimmering.

Matthew's, with its date long gone. It leaned just as it had the first day. Sarah paused and looked around. Still the 1990s.

Emma's own headstone. Nothing.

No shimmer. No change. Nothing at all.

Sarah pushed back her hair and stared out over the valley. Maybe this was a good way to end it. If only she could be sure Emma had gotten home.

Sarah walked to the edge of the hill and sat down, pulling her feet in close, wrapping her arms around her legs, and resting her chin on her knees. Tears welled in her eyes until the water tower in the distance faded away.

"I was afraid you wouldn't make it."

Sarah's looked carefully at the ground to her right. Calico skirt, bare feet.

"Emma! You're here." Sarah wiped her eyes and looked around. "But where's here?"

"My time, I hope." Emma pulled her feet under her skirt and copied Sarah's pose.

"I was afraid you ..."

"Me, too. When that shimmering started and things kept changing... But I did."

They stared out over the valley.

Finally Sarah broke the silence. "We have to quit, you know."

"I know."

"You could have gotten really lost," Sarah said. "We can't risk that happening again."

"I've thought about it. That shimmering the last few days. It's been a warning. Maybe too many times are coming together."

"Or ours are moving apart."

"But how do we stop it? I didn't mean to come to your time." Emma sighed. "Not right at that moment at least."

"Like I didn't mean to go to wherever it was I went after we pulled Matthew..."

"It could happen to either of us again."

A flock of birds Sarah didn't recognize darkened the sky. Passenger pigeons? She'd read there were zillions of them once.

"That tonic water you gave me helped Mama."

"I'm glad."

Emma waved away a pesky fly. "I'm going to talk to Papa about moving the outhouse. And I've started boiling all our water."

"Good."

"Jane thinks I'm crazy."

"I was thinking about that when you came. Who cares, if you don't get cholera?"

The birds finally passed.

Sarah wiped her eyes. This was so hard. "I'll never see you again."

"I know. I'll never see you either."

"You'll never know about the future."

"I'll live." Emma giggled. "I must. I'm your great-great-great-great grandma, remember?"

"That's right."

"Besides I know a lot right now."

It was getting late, Sarah realized, looking at the lengthening shadows. Matthew would come looking for Emma soon, to start supper. And her own mother would come up for air after working on her plans all afternoon and start to wonder what had become of her.

"My finding the ring started it." She stretched out her arm and looked at the gold circle on her finger. "If I give it back to you, maybe it'll stop."

"But you can't give it back to me." Emma reached out and touched it. "You need it to get home."

Sarah considered the ring a moment. "Maybe if I put it back in the drawer I can. You put it in in your time and I took it out in mine. I'll bet it works in reverse. I put it in in my time, you take it out in yours."

Emma frowned and bit her lip. "But we wanted to meet. We don't want to stop."

"Maybe it won't be so bad. You told me there are more settlers now, you'll have friends."

"And you'll be going back to school." Emma's smile was barely there, but it was there. "So will I, only I'll be the teacher."

Sarah turned to Emma. "You're kidding."

"Nope. Papa says some of the families are starting a school right after harvest and need a teacher. I've been hired."

There was crashing in the bushes. Emma got quickly to her feet. "It's Matthew. I better go."

"Bye." Sarah sat still and stared into the distance.

"Bye." Emma stepped away and was gone.

Sarah wiped a tear onto her sleeve. The water tower was back.

The drawer worked like a charm. Within an hour after Sarah tucked the ring carefully into the back corner, behind a pile of embroidered handkerchiefs, it was gone. Fifty-three minutes to be exact. Sarah was sure of the time because that was all the longer she'd been able to stay away from the chest.

It seemed as though that was all the longer she was able to stay away all the next week, too, and she finally came to

the conclusion that Emma must have much more willpower than she had. Sarah was sure if she'd had the ring and if putting it back would reconnect her with Emma she'd put it back. Every chance she got, Sarah checked the drawer. She checked when she got up in the morning, before she started the day's chores. She checked when she left the house to visit the library or go swimming with Linda or run an errand for Miss Hinkle. She checked when she came back from a bike ride with Keith or a trip to the county fair with the youth group. She checked before she went to bed at night.

After ten days Sarah was sure. The ring was gone. When she opened the drawer she could feel it. No matter how many times she stood here and looked in.

"....your room."

"What?" Sarah screamed and whirled toward the voice, slamming the drawer.

Her mother stood on the steps to the shanty, an odd look on her face. "I just said 'If you like that chest so much why don't you just move it to your room?'"

"Who says I like it?"

"Nobody. But it's time for us to decide what to keep for ourselves and what to sell and since you've been opening that drawer a dozen times a day I assumed that was something you'd like to keep."

Sarah touched the chest. "Miss Hinkle says it might have come here by covered wagon with our pioneer ancestors."

"That's a good reason to keep it."

"And it would fit in that corner by the window opposite the bed."

"Sold to the girl with the best excuses!" Her mother grinned and brought her hand down as though she were holding the auctioneer's gavel.

Besides, Sarah reflected, if she moved the chest, she'd remove temptation. Emma probably couldn't accidentally send her the ring through the chest if the chest wasn't in the same place in both times.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Sarah had just filled the last drawer in the chest when her mother called her to the living room. Miss Hinkle was sitting on the sofa, holding a package wrapped in brown paper. Sarah was barely able to say "Hi, Miss Hinkle" before Miss Hinkle rushed on.

"Hattie said I was to give you this, child. At the end of the first summer you lived here. After you'd been interested in the cemetery and history and old things. How she knew you'd be interested, I'm sure I don't know. You never seemed interested when she was alive. For that matter I don't know how she knew you'd come to live here at all. Though I suppose she knew your mama was interested in opening an antique shop. Hattie seemed to know when she was going to die."

Miss Hinkle stopped for a moment and Sarah found herself nearly gasping for air, as though she'd been the one talking a mile a minute. Miss Hinkle evidently had better breath control because she was off again before Sarah's lungs felt satisfied.

"She even said I'd outlive her. I said how could she be so ALL FIRED sure of such a thing? But she just said 'A gypsy lady told me, Ada.' Gypsy lady, indeed. Whoever heard of such a thing. I told her it made her sound like she'd lived

back in the dark ages and not at the end of the twentieth century.

"'So, smarty,' I said, 'Did this gypsy lady actually say anything about me?' And she said 'Of course. That's why I'm to give this to you. You'll be here when Sarah comes to live in my house.'"

Miss Hinkle plopped the package into Sarah's lap. "Don't just SIT there child. Open it. I'm DYING to see what's in it. She wouldn't even tell me, you know, and I've been her best friend absolutely forever."

Sarah began to pull away the tape from one end. Why would Aunt Hattie leave her a box? She'd never even liked Aunt Hattie and she suspected Aunt Hattie hadn't liked her, no matter what Miss Hinkle said about her expecting Sarah to be interested in history.

"Not like that, child. Open it like you mean to find out what's inside. Didn't anyone ever teach you how to open presents? You attack them."

"Sarah's always been careful when she opens her presents," her mother laughed. "Her father thinks she's a packrat at heart because only a packrat would care if the paper stayed perfect."

"Oh, pooh. Who cares how old brown paper looks?" Miss Hinkle reached out as though to take the package back again. "Let me help dear. I'll bet Hattie just used an old brown grocery sack, so the paper's already been used once."

Quickly Sarah ripped off the rest of the paper. And stared. It was a small very old tin box. The top was covered with a drawing of a girl in Greek robes on either side of a man's portrait and the words "EMERSON" and "MILD & MELLOW." One side said "Frank P. Lewis Cigar Co. Emerson Poet Size 10 cents." The opposite side said "The Aristocrat of Cigars."

Her mother coughed. "H-how interesting?"

Miss Hinkle moved restlessly on the sofa. "It can't be the box that's important. Why would Hattie be so concerned that you get an old tin cigar box? Lots of men smoked Emersons and everybody must have those old boxes. It must be what's inside. Go ahead. Open it."

Holding the box steady with one hand, Sarah used the other to pry off the lid. It came off easily for such an old box.

There, nestled in cotton was a small gold locket.

Miss Hinkle gasped. "Hattie's locket. Her great-grandmother gave that to her, you know. When Hattie was a little girl her father's grandmother lived with them. She and Hattie were the greatest friends and that locket was Hattie's most prized possession. She must have thought the world of you, child."

Sarah started to pick the locket up. There was something else under the cotton. She stopped. Hattie's great-grandmother? Hattie's great-grandmother was Emma. Hattie talked about gypsy ladies and knew when she was going to die?

Knew things only Emma knew? Quickly Sarah snapped the cigar box lid back in place

"I-I-I think I'll go upstairs and try the locket on."

Sarah bit her lip and turned to her mother. "Okay?"

Her mother looked startled. "Okay."

Miss Hinkle nodded. "You like it, child?"

Sarah stood up and moved toward the door. "Oh, yes, Miss Hinkle. I do. Thank you for bringing it."

She didn't wait for a reply, but dashed out of the room, down the hall, and up the stairs to her own room where she closed the door, sat on the bed, opened the cigar box again and removed the locket and cotton. There, folded to fit the bottom of the box was a white paper packet, sealed with red wax. Her own name, "Sarah Ellen Kendall," was written in very familiar handwriting across the flap. Emma's handwriting.

Biting her lip, Sarah pulled the packet out and held it a moment, unopened. Something hard and circular seemed to be folded into one corner.

Could it be the ring? She laid it on the bed and slid her fingernail under the edge of the wax. It popped free. She gulped. Carefully she began unfolding the fragile paper. Its folds were so intricate she was reminded of the Japanese origami she'd seen demonstrated one day at school. Except that instead of creating a swan or a flower she was discovering--

The ring. And a letter from Emma.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

June 12, 1926

Dear Sarah,

Don't be shocked. If you'll check our birth and death dates you'll know Hattie was a delightful child when I was an old, very old lady. It's hard to think of me as old and Hattie as young, I know, since you only knew us the other way round. But it's true.

As it happened, I have lived my last years in Hattie's parents' home, or, actually, they have lived with me as the house belonged to MY parents' and then to me and finally to them. Hattie and I have become very good friends, which I suspect is something you never dreamed. It's something that didn't occur to me, either, when you talked about her. I knew she would be my great-granddaughter but great-granddaughters are certainly not real to a fifteen-year-old. Sometimes they are not even real to a ninety-year-old.

At any rate, the very young and the very old have much in common and Hattie and I had more than most, as you well know. She has sat on my lap for hours while I told her stories. Among them, as you might have guessed, were stories of the summer you and I spent together. I have asked her to pass this box and the locket I gave her on to you. I suspect she thinks I'm a little crazed but she believes enough of what I have told her to do it.

You don't suppose there have been others like us in the past, do you? I've often wondered. I know most people only see their own little piece of time, otherwise we'd certainly hear about it. But we can't have been the only ones who could actually circle in time, could we? In fact I've wondered about Hattie--but if she has circled, or will, it wasn't with me. Maybe with my grandmother or your granddaughter? You don't suppose these circles somehow interconnect and we really make a chain like the one on the locket?

Oh, well. Pardon my ramblings. Just writing to you makes me feel young and curious but I must get on with what I meant to say..

The locket which Hattie is to put in the cigar box for you is one I bought a few years ago especially as a keepsake for her. Open it. The lock of hair on the left is mine, the lock on the right is Hattie's.

My life has gone much as you might expect from reading Hattie's genealogies, if you have been able to find all of her material yet. Yes, I remember you saying genealogy was her hobby. She is already well on her way and I like to think my stories have helped. Seeing the junk we have all saved and Hattie's tendency to leave things lying about, I have often thought of you and laughed to think of you cleaning this mess. I taught school for four years and then married Joseph

Oh, how I hated the farm that summer. And in the end it was mine. While fathers usually left their farms to their

sons my older brother Thomas left home to homestead in Colorado and had his own ranch and my little brother Matthew, the one you saved from drowning, ran away to draw for a newspaper during the War Between the States and died of dysentery. I hope you have seen some of his many other drawings. Since Joseph's older brother James, the one Jane married, took over their father's farm, and we lived here as soon as we were married so Joseph could help Papa with the farm and I could run the house, Papa left us the farm. Mama was never well again after the baby died that summer. Mandy went to live with Thomas' family when she was finished with school.

But I'm sure you can figure all that out from Hattie's papers. I really want to tell you about the ring.

It meant so much to me to meet you. I needed a friend badly that summer and so, I think, did you. We learned a lot from each other. I learned so much about the future that later some people even thought I was a witch, which amused me. If only they'd known what really happened.

When I found the ring in the chest of drawers that day I nearly cried. I left it there and checked it every day for a week until I was sure our link was broken. I have worn it myself, either on my finger or on a chain around my neck, every day since. I will seal it in this letter today.

All my love,

Emma

Carefully, Sarah refolded the letter, laid it in the Emersons box with cotton on top, and dropped the locket onto the cotton. She picked up the ring to put it in the box, too, then hesitated. It hadn't had a patina when she put it back in the drawer for Emma, but it had one now.

Smiling, Sarah slipped the ring on her finger. It fit perfectly. Like it was made for her.